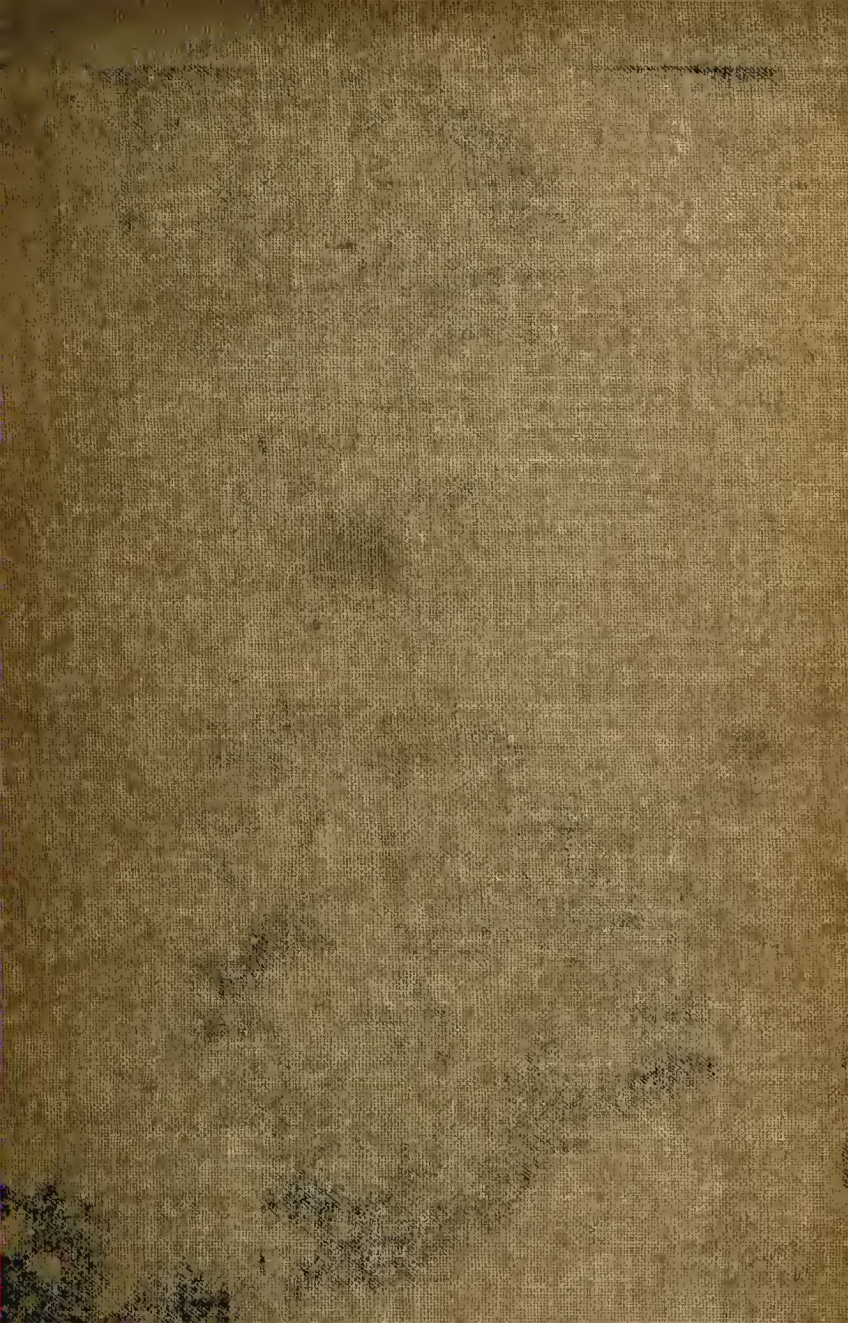




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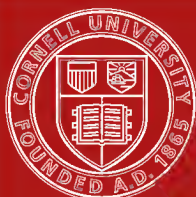
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EARTH BORN!

BY

SPIRITO GENTIL.

A NOVEL OF THE MISTY PAST—
THE STORY OF A STRANGE SEARCH—
A TALE OF THE BEGINNING—
A ROMANCE OF THE END.

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PREFACE.

It was in 1885, and I had been assigned to report the supposed coming war between Russia and Turkey. All indications being favorable for peace, however, at this time I was simply engaged in looking up matters of peculiar interest, sending in a letter now and then as chance favored me, for I had left European Turkey and was traversing her dominions in Asia.

Our caravan had departed from Bagdad, with its narrow, dirty streets, its hundred mosques, and its numerous bazaars, some time before, and we were nearing Mecca, after a tiresome and rather uninteresting journey mainly through Arabian deserts. The day had been very sultry, and men and camels were quietly resting preparatory for a fresh start in the early morning hours, when Hulaku, the queer Maronite from Damascus, entered my tent and handed me roll of manuscript, written in pure Italian, stating that it was the last instalment of that strange story which he had daily been presenting to me. I had never seen the man until he joined the caravan with a party some ten days before; but at his first glance toward me he seemed taken with my

appearance, and upon learning that I was a newspaper correspondent, from some of his acquaintances, he had the same night brought a roll, such as he now handed me. He stated that he received what was written therein from a wonderful ebony figure, which the Mahometans of Damascus had purchased from him a short time before, and that he was now traveling with it, in company with some of the purchasers, to place it in the famous Kaaba, or House of the Prophet, at Mecca, over the Black Stone which all true sons of Islam believe the Angel Gabriel brought there to form the foundation of the edifice. Each night I thanked him, as the roll was presented, promising that the story should be translated and published in English, as he faithfully declared that the figure commanded him to give it to me with this injunction. I laughed at his queer ideas, but took the rolls, and agreed to publish them under the authorship of Spirito Gentil, as that was the name signed.

My promise has been fulfilled, and the story is before you.

Very respectfully,

THE EDITOR.

New York, Oct. 1, 1889.

CHAPTER I.

“FOR TWENTY YEARS I HAVE GUARDED HER ENTRANCED BODY.”

It was in the year 178—, in the reign of Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette. The shadows of night had fallen over gay Paris, and one by one the workmen of the day and the roysterers of the evening parted company with their comrades, and bade good-night to the Rue St. Honore, leaving only the faint light of an occasional street lamp and the hurried tread of some belated wanderer to remind the world that it was not death which reigned throughout the neighborhood, but that his twin brother slumber, had set his seal upon most of the inhabitants.

And yet all were not asleep, for behind two of the curtained windows of a handsome residence gleamed a dull, reddish light, and ever and anon a figure could be faintly discerned moving about the apartment.

Presently one of the seeming wanderers stops opposite the house, looks with a keen scrutiny up and down the street, and then swiftly crosses the road, and stops at the door, not with the bold freedom of the fearless guest who knows he is welcome, but with the stealthy step of one who has his reasons for thus avoiding the servants at this hour. He quietly turns the bolt. The door as silently opens,

after a moment's delay, and without a word, the visitor mounts the stairs, and stands upon the threshold of the lighted chamber.

Within it a middle-aged man, evidently busy with his thoughts, sits gazing dreamily at a miniature lying upon a table before him.

"May your thoughts be merrier than mine to-night, Minotti," and as the strong tones of the visitor reached the other, he started slightly, and turned with a smile that had more of sadness than of pleasure in it.

"Welcome, Adrian. So you keep your word, and are here to learn the truth to-night. I had expected you, and yet hoped you would not come."

"I know it, and yet I must sometime learn what you alone will tell me. I have waited so long, so patiently for this hour, and now it is at hand. Keep me not in suspense, my more than father, but tell me all. Once more, as I have asked a thousand times, what and who did my birth design me to be, and how comes it that I am what I am?"

And with these words the young man, for he was young, threw himself upon a sofa, and looked expectantly into Minotti's face.

The elder man sighed heavily, and the shadows deepened upon his sombre face as he looked into that of his visitor. After a short, but searching scrutiny, he took up the miniature, and gazing at it a moment, handed it to the young man. It bore the likeness of a beautiful woman. The face was oval, the nose Grecian, the lips delicately curved in a sad, yet sweet expression, the chin small and rounded, the hair golden, the eyes large and grey, and out of them looked a soul and a nature so true and so pure, so

spiritual, so refined, so far removed from the grosser elements of Earth, that one was almost led to ask, is this really the face of some living woman, or is it the ideal of a master artist, a portrait of some lovely vision pictured by genius and penciled by art?

The young man gazed long and earnestly at the portrait, and then looking at Minotti said slowly:

"It is the face of an angel, not of a woman. Who is she, and what had she to do with my life?"

"For her sake I became a forsworn priest, and through the influences with which she was surrounded I have well nigh lost all the beliefs which my order hold most sacred, all the faith with which the church so firmly clasps my brothers. Perdition may claim me for its own, but the seed sown cannot be uprooted. The new and strange beliefs engendered cannot be overthrown.

"For years have I, the so-called Religious Priest of St. Medard, for when I gained that name I was a true priest, carried in my heart and brain a struggle which at last has overpowered all my early teachings, and leads me into an open sea of inquiry and doubt, where nature reigns, and the combat between set beliefs and unknown possibilities is sharply defined.

"This is the so-called age of reason, and yet mysticism finds more devotees than the church. New and strange beliefs are permeating the hearts of the people, more than is the love of Christianity; and this pure face, with its image ever graven in my memory, is the one bright star which I have followed, and through such pursuit, have neither found content, or knowledge sufficient to carry me where she dwells."

"You speak in riddles to-night, and I fail to grasp

your meaning. You are still a faithful priest, and your parish has no fault to find. What more can you ask?" and the young man half rose from the sofa as he spoke, and gazed upon his companion.

"What more can I ask?" repeated Minotti, while a new and strange expression to Adrian swept over his usually sombre face. "I can and do ask for a knowledge that will free me from Earthly thralldom, and lead me to where this face, living not dead, awaits me. To that part of this wide Universe where Earthly ones may go by the aid of science without awaiting for that death which the church holds can alone free the soaring spirit and the trameled will of man from this sphere. It is the aim of all my research to follow where this pure face has fled, and return with her."

"And is she dead?" questioned Adrian, sorrowfully.

"Dead, no. She lives. The ravages of death have never marred the beauty of that face. She was the victim of a mystic conspiracy, so strange that man would not believe it. No court can punish, for it is far beyond the reach of mortal laws. Dead to all the world, she lives—living, her soul and spirit are ranging through space, while her body, lifelike and free from death, remains in my charge awaiting her return to claim it."

And Minotti's eyes flashed as he gazed into Adrian's, and appeared to challenge his rising wonder with unearthly fire.

The young man gazed at him in rising anxiety. In all his remembrance of Minotti, he had seen but the kindly priest, sad and downcast at times, but always self contained, grave, gentle.

But this evening all was changed, and lashed by his memories of the past, the shadows of life cast their fitful influence over him, and transformed his character, bringing forth a passionate, unholy phase, and Adrian was astonished at the change it wrought.

He thought his erstwhile sombre companion had suddenly become insane, so brilliant was the piercing gaze of the deep set grey eyes, and so strange his words.

"Yes," muttered the priest, "they drove her spirit forth, but for twenty long years I have guarded her entranced body from harm, and now the time has finally arrived when I can unfold the secret to you.

"You wish to know who you are, and the history of your people, which I have so zealously guarded. Then know that you are the only son and heir of a once noble family, rich and learned, now fallen and dishonored.

"By some trick of mystic sorcery, by continual working upon his mind through charlatanism, mixed with some truths, your father became an easy prey to machinations too intricate for me to unravel fully with my limited knowledge. At the time I knew nothing, and simply thought him a partially insane mystic, searching for that arcane knowledge which the church so strenuously forbids.

"But for her sake, your mother's, she whose face you see before you in that miniature, I took a step one fatal night which has proven the entering wedge that split the rock of safety upon which I previously stood, and let in the conflict which has since wrecked my usefulness, and made me, at times feel and know

that I was doomed should the Cardinal but discover to what extent my research has carried me."

The priest stopped, sighed heavily, and bowing his head upon his hands, continued.

"Your father was a strange man, Adrian, and few—not even your mother—understood him. He was given over body and soul to practices not approved by the church, although followed by many of the members of numerous secret societies in that day, and since, for France and Europe are filled with them, even to-day.

"In youth he had been a great student, and when I met him he was long since sated with the ordinary things of this life, and was deeply engaged in endeavors to unravel the mysteries of nature which surround us.

"He was feared by his neighbors, and sought the companionship of those like himself, men of science, mystics, followers of Paracelsus and Christian Rosenkreutz, and often of charlatans who impose upon the world till discovered in their falsity.

"Among the curious beliefs which he indulged in was that mind was superior to matter to such a degree that the latter was subservient in all things, and that the spirit and the soul could throw off this mortal body and soar through space at will, returning when desired, even after years of absence, provided always that the life principle in the body left behind was sufficient to keep it intact, and not allow it to decay in the interval.

"He held that man was composed of four distinct elements, as follows:

"1st. Spirit, or mind, the intellectual, reasoning principle, which never dies,

"2d. The soul, which envelops the spirit, and is part of the nebulae from which Earth was originally formed, and therefore Earthly, and surrounding all Earthly things, conforming to the shape of that substance which it attached itself to, and eventually dispersing after death.

"3d. The life principle, existent alike in every living thing, man, tree, or plant, and,

"4th. The body or matter.

"He claimed that the life principle and the body could be held in abeyance by the will of the spirit, and that the stilled heart could be revived and the seeming dead revived, provided that accident or decay had not injured the vital parts to a fatal degree, and that certain laws of nature were complied with."

"Who was my father, and who this lady? Tell me their names," interrupted Adrian anxiously.

Minotti hesitated a moment, and then said: "Have patience, and you will very soon know all. Before mentioning their names, let me tell you something of their history.

"As I was saying, your father held that the spirit could desert the body at will.

"He believed that the human body, like that of the despised serpent, the lowly frog, the sluggish crocodile, and certain animals which spend half their lives in a torpid state, requiring no food when in this condition, could be reduced to the same degree of torpor, and lie dormant for months, ay, years if necessary, under applications of the same law which governs the above animals and reptiles.

"In proof of this he cited numerous cases of different people who had been thrown into cataleptic trances, lasting for weeks, and he held that in such

cases the accidental workings of this law of nature had accomplished the end he believed in and desired to fully master, viz :

"That the spirit had left the body, and the life principle, which he believed was electric, had become dormant, yet not extinct, and that under just such conditions, the body could lie for years, if desired, while the spirit soared away into this and other worlds, bereft of everything Earthly which clogs and impedes its flight."

"This is a grand belief."

"Yes, in some ways, but he held other beliefs which were equally strange, and not calculated to re-assure mortals.

"He was a disbeliever in God, not originally, but was led into it by other beliefs.

"He was likewise a follower of Simon Magus, a delver into what are known as the black arts, and a deep student of the rules which governed the Rosicrucians, or the followers of the Rosy Cross.

"Through his enthusiasm he was frequently imposed upon by charlatans, and it was his faith in a band of them, linked together for purposes of plunder, though professing the highest beliefs as their standard, holding a creed so high and noble that it well might attract a great mind tired and weary of this world, that he and your beautiful mother lost their identity and their fortunes, and to this same cause you have lost your name, inherited station, and wealth of your ancestors."

"How is this? You speak in riddles."

"Your father and your mother were the Count Jules and the Countess Lena Balzac, and you are their only living representative."

"The—Count—Jules Balzac—my—father! He! who murdered his beautiful wife, and then made away with himself and fortune together! No—no! Not this. My father was surely an honorable man, and this Count, he was a devil incarnate," gasped Adrian.

"No. Not a devil. Simply a deluded man, who sacrificed all, his life, wife and fortune in behalf of an idea, which you have but just said was a grand one."

"Balzac le Diable, my father! Ah, no wonder you refused my questioning. And, now, I think of it, this very house was his, and people shun it even to-day, although it has been years since—since—"

"Since he made his last great sacrifice. Yes, it has been twenty years since I last met the Count and the Countess in this very room.

"Twenty years ago to-night.

"And the next morning all Paris rang with the murder of the Countess Balzac, the suicide of her husband, the Count, and the failure of their once great fortunes. But the world failed to understand, it never will understand, his motives, or his character."

"What were they, then? Tell me, his heir to infamy, that I may strengthen my nature to bear this disgrace."

"There is no disgrace, even if you come before the world as Adrian, Count Balzac, but you need not unless you choose do so. You can remain plain Adrian Courcey as long as you will. But I repeat there is no disgrace.

"Your father laid down his life through belief in a fatal idea, and it was the wish of the Countess to accompany him in the trial. I think, perhaps, she

thought it would be a long farewell, and wished it as a glad release from the trials of life. If so, she gained her desire, and swiftly."

"Tell me of it, and convince me if you can, that he was guiltless."

"Twenty years ago to-night I was summoned to confess the Count Jules and Countess Lena Balzac, whom I understood from the messenger, were going abroad on the morrow.

"I came here, and was shown to this room. I came in, sat down, and soon the Count appeared.

"He was not a favorite with the church, which refused approval of his practices. Never before, although I had been the family confessor for several years, had I been called upon to perform that office for him. Indeed, I had heard that he never confessed. Believed in no God. Needed no priest.

"As he entered the room he bowed in his courtly way, and said, fixing his eyes upon me as he spoke:

"'Father Minotti, I am going on a journey. It may be long, it may be short. The Countess accompanies me, by her own request. I sent for you in her behalf, as a priest of the church, in which she thoroughly believes.

"For myself, you know I make few professions of belief, and among those few, the creed of Christianity is not included. If, however, as a man, you are willing to accept a confidence of a rather unusual nature, and will give me your word not to reveal what is told you until the appointed time, I shall be very glad to avail myself of this opportunity to confide a secret to you.'

"'Does it concern your soul?' I asked.

"He laughed grimly, and replied. 'My soul, aye,

that it does, and my body also, but my soul and spirit most of all.'

" 'Then,' said I, 'I will accept your confidence as a man, and keep it as a priest.'

" 'Well said, Father Minotti, and now listen, for as both man and priest you have given your word to retain what I tell you until such time as you are released.

" 'Know then, that the journey I make to-morrow is a voyage of the soul and spirit, out of the body, which I leave behind, and in your keeping until I return to claim it, not at resurrection day, but when I have fulfilled the desire of my heart, and journeyed where I will.'

" 'But, Count,' I exclaimed.

" 'Listen first,' he continued.

" 'Know that I believe in the transmigration of spirit. In the entire freedom of the spirit from the body at will. In the ability of the spirit to depart from this Earthly covering, and soar through boundless space to other worlds, to Jupiter, to Mars, to Saturn, to Venus, and all the bright array of planets which are far beyond the reach of mortal eye.

" 'I likewise believe that the body can be kept for years without food, without drink, and free from decay, provided the life principle is stupefied, not killed, and that the body is kept free from accidents which would deprive the vital parts of their functions.

" 'I have discovered that the life principle is stupefied when the body is entranced, or when it is overpowered by certain peculiar practices, and a powerful drug or essence which simply is a trance producer, and not really a poison. For poison

destroys, while this does not kill, but simply suspends the functions.

“‘ Sooner or later, a dormant body, made so under favorable conditions, will come to life when re-entered by the spirit.

“‘ Know also, that the spirit leaves the body under these dormant conditions, as it does sometimes in sleep, in dreams, in trances, aye, and in death, although in the latter case it never returns, for the life principle is then completely destroyed. The dead body has no use for the living spirit, which in itself can never die.

“‘ Know also, that the soul, the covering of the spirit, resembles the body in shape, and is the essence of the Earth.

“‘ That all the desires, hopes, aspirations, faults, of each individual are contained in the soul, the same out of as in the body, and that each soul could be recognized by those who knew its body upon Earth could it but be seen with the lens of the mortal eye, out of which the spirit sees while in the body.

“‘ However, as the body alone is material, so the body alone has brute, material power, and the spirit, freed from the body, has no power to protect the body, or to assist it in any material danger which threatens it.

“‘ The spirit can impress by visions, dreams, thoughts and premonitions, other spirits, but this is all.

“‘ The material, or bodily power, being absent, the spirit has no material force to rely upon whatever. Consequently it must act through the minds and not the bodies of mortal men when out of the body itself,

“‘I wish to impress this upon you fully, so that you may appreciate the utter helplessness of the spirit in a material way when out of the body, and that you may also know how important it is to keep the body intact and free from injury while the spirit is absent, so that when it returns it may find its house habitable, in condition to receive it, and the life principle not destroyed while in its dormant state.’

“‘And what do you propose to do?’ I asked, with great misgivings.

“‘I intend to take a spirit journey with the Countess, and leave our bodies in your keeping until we return to claim them, and renew our mortal life.’

“‘And when will this be?’ I asked, thinking to humor him out of this project.

“‘We shall return when we have explored the Universe,’ he answered, ‘and its dimensions being utterly unknown our stay cannot be limited to days and weeks, or even years as yet. If satisfied, we shall remain away for years, perhaps forever, but if we fail in finding what we wish, we may return at once.’

“‘And do you run no risk in this spirit enterprise?’ I asked.

“‘None, save in leaving the body to be cared for by mortals who often think it dead when it simply lies stupefied, and treat it accordingly, bury it, burn it, mutilate it, or drive the life completely out of it by various practices.’

“‘And if I refuse to take care of the bodies when the spirits have fled?’ I asked.

“‘Then will you never know another peaceful moment if we return to Earth. For spirits have this

power left, to haunt and impress mortals with fear continually, and while they cannot do bodily injury, they can so punish them mentally that they often seek death as a release from torture.'

"'But the Countess Lena, will she willingly go on this mad journey?' I exclaimed, beginning to realize that his mind was made up fully.

"'At her special request we go together. We have taken spirit journeys before, but then she had no voice in the matter. Her spirit was under my control, and followed me.'

"'You must be mad,' I rejoined, feeling terrified at his words, 'for I am her confessor, and she has never mentioned this to me.'

"'No. She never knew anything of it when I returned with her to the body, for there is one peculiarity about journeys taken in that way. It is this. They are not remembered in the body.

"'The faculty of memory is really more of a human than a spirit faculty, in this, that the human memory is a photograph gallery, upon which each act of life is photographed and kept minutely. The negatives in this gallery, so to speak, can be destroyed, as is frequently done, by spells of sickness, blows upon the head or falls, which by acting upon the material body destroys the memory, but not the spirit, which simply reads the memory, as the reader does a book.

"'Upon this book of memory are left only such impressions as come to us in mortal life, the book, or gallery, itself, being mortal. Consequently the spirit freed from the body, has no tablet of human memory to refer to and record its experiences, and when the spirit returns to the body all memory of what happened in that state is obliterated, unless

arrangements are made to retain the experiences in other ways.

“‘But the spirit has a memory of what occurs in this state, and every time it re-enters that condition it remembers what took place in previous states of the same kind in the same life. This is spirit memory, not human memory, however. It can never be destroyed.’

“‘And does the freed spirit remember the experiences it passed through in the mortal body?’ I asked.

“‘The spirit memory records and retains everything, not only in the body, but out of it, while the human memory is often defective. Should you ever free your soul and spirit from the material surrounding it, and range through space at will, you will better understand these things. I have done so. You may do so if you will. I talk now to the man, not to the priest.

“‘God forbid that I should ever do so,’ I devoutly said, ‘until my appointed time, when I shall bid farewell to the body forever.’

“‘As you please, but remember this, that it is nature, only, and her laws, which can so act upon the human system.

“‘The same law of life governs the despised serpent that governs man, yet we set our minds loftily above it, and say, you have no spirit which lives hereafter, we have.

“‘My belief is so grand, so liberal, that I believe each animal endowed with some spirit element, as well as life principle, for without spirit elements, the life principle is useless, and could not even provide for itself.

“ ‘You call it instinct in the brute, and soul or spirit in man, yet some brutes show more spirit element than some men, more affection, less cruelty, more faith, less selfishness’.

“ ‘This is blasphemy,’ I said.

“ ‘Against man, not nature. But we will not discuss it. Nothing save spirit life experience will ever teach humanity how crude are human ideas, how limited is human knowledge, and how little we really understand the world about us and its mysteries.

“ ‘I go to explore them, do you remain behind and carefully tend the shell I leave with you.

“ ‘But remember this, that spirits cannot only return to their own bodies, but can enter others, and fight for possession, sometimes conquering the weaker soul element, rendering the human either better or worse than before.

“ ‘Neither wall, or fire, or water, can stop the freed spirit. It is like the wind, it is like the air. It is here, it is there. It goes where it will and nothing save a stronger spirit power can deter it.

“ ‘I promise you now, that if you fail in attendance upon my body, I will fight with your soul for possession of your body, and I shall win if I attempt it.

“ ‘And now good-night and farewell, I must go.’

“ ‘But stay a moment, what shall be done with your body should this prove true?’ I cried.

“ ‘She will tell you. I go to explore and must prepare.

“ ‘Ere we meet again the mysteries of life and the silences of death, the throes of the earthquake and the rush of the tornado, the grand depths of the fathomless ocean and the limitless spaces beyond the

stars, beyond our sun, all that the Universe contains, shall be laid before me like an open book.

“ ‘Grovel in this little world, Minotti, and seek to console yourself for its want of satisfaction to your spirit in hopes of a life beyond.

“ ‘I go to explore that life before my time. Farewell !’

“ His eyes blazed as he spoke, and the daring spirit of the man shone out of them with enthusiastic fervor. He disappeared, and I felt strangely awed, yet attracted by his words. What did they mean? Could it be true, or was he insane? Certainly the latter, I reasoned.

“ I had just made up my mind to follow and argue him out of his purpose, or, failing in that, to implore him to attempt his experiment alone and not involve the Countess in it, when the door opened and she appeared.

“ What a vision of loveliness she then presented. Never had I seen her so sweetly sad, so resigned, so beautiful. She stood a moment looking at me, with her great grey searching eyes, as if questioning my very thoughts, and then said :

“ ‘Father, I have sinned against the church and God. Upraid me not. Seek not to dissuade me, it will be useless,’ and her tones were firm, though sad.

“ How it came about I know not, but it seemed as if my powers of reasoning were deadened within me when I looked at her. I saw and felt it would be useless to argue or implore, and she divined it. Still I spoke calmly :

“ ‘Confess to God and the church ; pray for strength and it will come.’

“ ‘Too late for strength to avail me now. What I

have felt since I first met Count Balzac will soon come to pass. For good or for evil, his spirit controls mine, and I follow where he leads.

“Do not waste your arguments upon the inevitable, but listen, while I may tell.

“The Count has told you we go on a journey, and that our stay is uncertain. I go willingly, gladly, but ere I go, to you, my friend and my confessor, I confide my child.

“Should I not return for years, rear him in the belief that he is an orphan, for I seem to feel that it is the safer way. Give him the name of my father's house and call him Adrian Courcey.

“If in twenty years from to-night I have not returned to claim him, then in your judgment you may tell him all. It is the Count's wish and my own.’

“In twenty years I may be dead,’ I answered as in a dream.

“Then let the mystery of his house die with you. It is better thus, perhaps, for know that my great fortune is so fixed that his life would be in danger as my son and heir, were he left alone in the world as such. In twenty years he will have reached manhood and can defend himself from enemies now powerful.’

“You are fully determined upon your course, regardless of all consequences?’ I said.

“I am fully determined. I hope for the best, and that we shall shortly return, but if not, then remember, and above all keep your knowledge secret, for my sake.

“Let the world think what it will. I shall be beyond it. But my Adrian will be here, and I shall

see him again. I feel it. He shall see me as you see me now and shall talk to me as you talk, in his manhood.'

• " 'When do you go, and how?'

" 'In a little while, and by means of this,' and she held a vial of clear liquid, pure and golden-hued, to the light.

" A thought flashed over me. 'Let me see it,' I cried eagerly.

" She smiled sadly and handed it to me, saying :

" 'I divine your purpose, but it is useless. Still, you may keep it, and if at some time you would join the world of disembodied souls, this will aid you. But it is the final step only. Before the draught is taken, the body must be prepared by fasting, and the mind by research, for the more you subdue the body, the greater is the mind master of it, and the easier it becomes to leave it.

" 'Study what you will find in this room, and you will learn how to master your own spirit.'

" 'Countess, your words terrify me for the safety of your soul hereafter. You were not always as you are to-night,' I answered.

" 'No. I feel strangely different to-night from ever before, and yet I have a dim recollection that I have felt this way in some degree at times, but not so strongly as now.

" 'But listen, for the hour is drawing near when I must go. I charge you to watch over my child as I will ever watch over you both. Follow your impressions regarding him, for if possible, I will impress you in his behalf. Educate him, but not as a priest. Some day he may come to his own, when his enemies and mine are at rest.'

“Here she sighed deeply, and walking to that portrait which you see panelled over the mantelpiece, pressed a secret spring, and disclosed a hidden recess behind the picture. Drawing from it a packet and a miniature, she handed them to me with these words:

“‘On the twentieth anniversary of to-night, should you both live, you are free to disclose to the heir of our house his true name and station. Show him this miniature of his mother, tell him of her sorrow at leaving him, of her uncertainty and doubt regarding the future, and open this packet, which will explain some things now unexplainable.

“‘Count Balzac has charged you with the mission of watching over the empty dormant body. I charge you with a holier mission, that of watching over and caring for the living body and the budding spirit. As you treat my child, so may Heaven remember you, for my sake and his.

“‘You will find in yonder recess the Count’s sacred books, which he bade me confide to you. Delve not into these mysteries, if you would be content with the world around you, and remain a faithful priest.

“‘At your sanctuary you will find a letter, containing a sufficient legacy for the education of my Adrian.

“‘As for our bodies, the Count’s and my own, all that will be necessary is to keep them from harm. You will find written instructions in the letter. Remember my child. Farewell! till we meet again.’

“‘When shall that be?’ I asked in dumb agony.

“‘To-morrow you shall see my body, and I shall see you. Farewell!’

“I started to my feet, and would have implored her to reconsider, but she suddenly disappeared, seemingly through the solid wall, and I heard the Count's voice, in far away but distinct tones :

“‘Farewell! Minotti. You have spoken with her soul to-night. Her body you will find, but not here. Farewell! till we meet again.’

“I rushed from the room, and knocked at the door of the Count's apartments. His valet appeared, stating that his master had left the house some moments before, and that he knew not where he had gone. I searched the apartments, but the Count had indeed left.

“The Countess had not been seen since early in the evening, and you, a babe of three years, were all that was left of the Balzac race in the house of the Balzacs. I stopped and looked at you, but did not disturb your sleep. You lay so quiet amid these strange scenes that I had not the heart to waken you.

“I went to the sanctuary, not knowing what else to do, and there I found this letter,” and Minotti handed Adrian a faded package.

Adrian quietly opened the letter, earnestly perused its contents, giving vent to an occasional interjection of surprise, finally finished it, and looking up with sudden interest said :

“Did you find their bodies exactly as described in this letter?”

“I did, the following day.”

“And were they carried to the tomb, which it seems had been prepared for them in advance, safely and without accident?”

“Yes, after lying in state here for three days, they were followed to their resting place near Versailles,

on the private estates of the Count, being denied burial in consecrated ground, as he anticipated and wished, thus rendering the plan an easy one."

"Have they been there from then till now, and have you seen them since?"

"I have seen them since, and they are still in their Egyptian tomb, unnoted by the gay and busy world around, forgotten, and I trust, forgetting."

"Has no decay marred their features in all these years?"

"None. They are as perfect now, and she as beautiful, as twenty years ago. In fact, more so, if anything. No line of suffering or anxiety dims the beauty of her face. No trace of age throws its disfiguring shadow over the contour of that lovely form."

"All this is very strange to me, so much so, that did I not know you well, Minotti, I should say it was the tale of an enthusiast gone mad over the dreamings of his imagination.

"I, a Balzac, the heir of a house once fortunate, now fallen, and having a father and a mother living, and not dead, though dead to all the world for years.

"What think you, candidly, Minotti, of this? Do you believe it?"

"I know it. Would to God and the church I did and could not believe it. My life has been harassed for years with this knowledge; with this secret and its consequences.

"Now that it is told at last, I feel relieved, but you, who would know, you will not escape, I fear. Knowing some things, you will strive to learn more, as I did, and then farewell to rest and peace and contentment with this world."

"You are right. I am not content. My restless spirit already feels the truth of what you say, and yearns and pants for knowledge of the unknowable and unknown to mortals. What my father knew, that will I know, and more, aye, more."

Adrian arose to his feet as he spoke, and his flashing eyes turned from Minotti to the panelled portrait on the wall.

Was it his imagination? Did he dream? or did a faint smile overcast the features of the portrait, and a gleam of life apparently flash from its intelligent eyes.

"Ha! Minotti, see!" cried Adrian, pointing to the panel, which was slowly opening, as if drawn by invisible hands.

Minotti looked and shuddered visibly, while an ashen hue overspread his face. He sprang to his feet, and they both gazed intently at the phenomena. The portrait was now apparently still smiling, and within the recess a hand, dimly visible, waved to and fro in the darkness, with the index finger ever pointing to a roll which lay beneath.

Adrian sprang forward, as if to grasp the roll, but Minotti gripped his arm and huskily said,

"One moment, ere you decide. If you knew that inside that panel lay a secret which might ruin your life in this world, and jeopardize your spirit beyond, would you still grasp it?"

"Aye, though Death itself, and Hell were now combined in yonder recess, and stretched forth their arms to welcome me, still I would fathom this secret. I feel now that I am indeed a Balzac. Knowledge I will possess, be it what it may, and lead to where it will."

And the enthusiastic young man rushed forward to the cabinet, and again would have grasped the roll, but the portrait swung back, and with a rapid click the panel closed ere he could reach it, while Minotti muttered under his breath, in a relieved whisper :

“Not yet.”

Adrian turned with a bewildered expression to his companion, whose head was lowered upon his hands.

Then he looked at the panel, but the shadow of a smile no longer lighted up the dark, foreign features of the portrait, which were now absolutely forbidding in their stern severity. A shade of disappointment also seemed to linger over the features, and the lips appeared ready to open with denunciation, but no sound came from them.

“How is this Minotti? What does this mean?” cried Adrian.

“It means that the power of the living is greater than that of the dead. That the living priest is still mightier than the dead scientist. You may if you must delve into forbidden things, but not until you are prepared,” calmly replied Minotti, while beads of perspiration stood upon his forehead, as evidencing the effort he had made.

“Come,” he cried, grasping his companion’s arm, “the day is breaking, and soon all Paris will be awake. I cautioned you about entering this house, and it will not do for others to see us here together. Your enemies and mine are watchful of that which they have stolen, and even this property, this house, is no longer your own. Come, ere those awake who should not see you.” And Minotti slipped the pack-

age and the portrait into the folds of his mantle, and started for the door.

But Adrian still lingered, and gazing at the portrait said :

“ Whose face is this, so dark and majestic looking ? It must have been an ancient king of the old world.”

“ No. It is the portrait of some ancient sorcerer, I believe, and two of them, together with the cabinets and their contents, were purchased by the Count from some dealer in antiquities at Cairo, who had no power to use them. He knew not what they were.

“ Those who would discover the secrets of the cabinet must possess more than ordinary attributes, and you, by evidence to-night, possess them. None living, save yourself and I, know aught but that this is a simple portrait hanging lazily upon the wall of this disused room.

“ But come, and quickly, for the people are stirring below, and they should not see you here.”

And the two slowly and silently reached the landing, and Minotti producing a key, unlocked the entrance, and they stepped out upon the street, carefully closing the door after them.

CHAPTER II.

“THIS IS A STRANGE WORLD.”

It was early morning, the harbingers of coming day, the venders of vegetables, cartmen and milkmen were already straggling one by one over the streets which would so soon be alive with the busy rush of Parisian daylight.

The East was faintly illumined, heralding the approaching morning, and overhead the stars were beginning to lose their brightness and pale before the coming splendor of the fire-girt sun, but far down in the horizon, lingering brightly and shining serenely beautiful and clear, Saturn hung over the world. A blazing planet in limitless space, a brilliant beacon among the host of shining stars surrounding.

“My star,” observed Adrian, “the star of my nativity. They say that Saturn at the natal hour brings much mystery and change to mortals. Of mystery and change my life has been indeed made up, and yet I feel that what I have seen is as nothing to what I will see.”

“What you have seen to-night prepares you some for what you may see in the future,” quietly replied Minotti.

“And when shall I begin?” eagerly rejoined Adrian. “First of all, and at once, I would go to the buried pyramid on the old estate. I must see the bodies of my parents, and then join them, or

bring back the wandering spirits to their Earthly homes.

"My mother, how I long to see her once alive; to feel a mother's love, to fold her in my arms, forever free from trial and solicitude.

"But have you never felt her presence near you in all these years? Has no premonition warned you that she might possibly be watching over you in my behalf?"

"Yes, I have felt her presence. More than that, I have seen her standing near, but ever when I would accost her, she disappears. Latterly, she has not appeared to me, and I have diligently sought her, but without avail," rejoined Minotti. "But we will together visit the resting place where the bodies lie, and the sooner the better, now that you know all."

"When shall it be?"

"We will go to the chateau with the rising sun, but will not disturb the sarcophagus until later. There are curious people passing that way occasionally, and it is better not to excite a curiosity that is still existent regarding the Chateau Balzac and its owner. There are many strange tales afloat in the neighborhood about the Count, and the people are ever ready for some new development. No visitors will stay at the chateau, the report being that it is the home of evil spirits, and to this report we owe our surest way to secrecy, if we are careful. So the sooner we get there the better it will be for our purpose," replied Minotti.

"How often do you go there, Minotti? Do you keep guard as was desired, and faithfully?"

"I keep faithful watch through another, and go

myself regularly. Do you remember my frequent trips in which you were never allowed to participate? This was my destination. But here is a cab returning doubtless from some late gathering. Hail it, and we start at once."

Adrian, who was all impatience, hailed the driver, who sleepily asked their destination, and when told it was near Versailles, refused to take the trip, and was about driving on, when Minotti drew out a purse and offered thrice the fare. The offer was tempting, and the cab was engaged. They entered, and were soon speeding away at a fair pace for the mysterious chateau.

The early and dim light of the coming day heightened the marked contrast between the faces of the two men.

Minotti sat back in sombre silence, his generally impassive features and calm demeanor now giving place to an expression of defiant submission, and yet of glad relief, chastened by mental suffering into sadness and vague, apprehensive uncertainty.

He looked the man whose mind was made up for the worst, and yet who hoped for the best under the press of fatality, and the knowledge that sooner or later the coming problem of that day must be met.

Adrian's countenance, on the contrary, was fairly ablaze with enthusiasm and hope. Determination lurked in the set curve of his lips, and flashed from the bright glance of his brilliant eyes.

It needed no second glance to tell the careful observer that this man's life had undergone some marvelous change since the previous evening, that will and ambition had awakened at once, and together had clasped hands in a united effort to change the current of his previously inactive life.

Where would they lead him, those winged coursers of the mind, which, left untrammelled, ever speed onward till mortals tire and fall exhausted by the way in vain efforts to keep side by side?

The mind and its passions—how they lash our poor bodies into submission, during life, and at the last hour, when the unequal struggle between mind and matter leads to death, how loftily the former soars above the worn out shell, and seeks companionship with kindred spirits elsewhere.

But the ambition, the will, the desires, are they left behind, buried in the decayed body?

Who can of a surety answer?

Not Adrian as yet.

On they sped. Fainter and fainter shone the stars o'erhead—brighter and brighter grew the eastern sky. But far away in the firmament, Saturn still defied the coming day to quench his light, and beamed as brightly as before.

Soon, ah, soon, Adrian, thy star shall give way to the glorious light of the day god. Soon, ah, soon, shall you enter upon a new existence, and thy previous life shall grow dim before it, as does Saturn before the sunlight.

And while they are rolling toward the chateau, let us take a brief view of the two men so intimately thrown together.

Father Minotti, a native of Corsica, had early left that island, and entered the priesthood in Paris, where he had been attached to several parishes during his many years of service to the church. At this time he was attached to the parish of the Church of St. Etienne du Mont, adjoining the Pantheon, and one of the oldest churches of old Paris, but when Adrian

had been so mysteriously committed to his care, he was a member of the priesthood of St. Medard, and was best known as the Religious Priest of St. Medard, a name he had gained by his rigid observance of all the rules and ceremonies of the church.

In appearance, Father Minotti was of medium height, heavily set, with broad, massive brows, large, intelligent grey eyes, grey hair, and a face whose general appearance denoted sombre thought and much self-communion, unless lit by one of his occasional smiles, which had seldom occurred of late, however, and then it appeared the face of a kindly, gentle, sympathetic priest, ever ready to listen to the ills of his parishioners, and give them a kind word, or an encouraging glance. He might have been fifty years of age, judging from his general appearance.

His companion, the young Adrian Courcey, had just completed his twenty-third year, and his appearance indicated that he was a true son of his studious sire.

His eyes were dark and dreamy, save when lit by the fire of enthusiasm and determination. His brow was broad and intellectual, his hair dark and wavy; his mouth large, and determination lurked in the slightly drooping corners. His chin square and firm; and his figure above the medium height, and well built, in graceful yet wiry proportions. The face was closely shaven, showing every feature plainly, and denoting much research, for he had been early put under instruction, and had several of the best tutors, especially in astronomy, which was his favorite study.

Withal, he was gifted with a generous disposition, and a strong, healthy constitution. His life had been

somewhat secluded, and his history, as we have seen, had been sedulously kept from him by Minotti, who alone knew its details.

He had never journeyed out of France, and with the exception of occasional trips about the environs of Paris, knew but little of the world outside that city, but Paris he knew well, and next he knew Versailles, where the magnificent royal palace and gardens were situated, and where at this time Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette held their brilliant court.

He had not been impregnated with the views of Voltaire, although at his death, some few years before, he had been greatly interested in the excitement occasioned by the refusal of the church to bury the body, and the fight made by the French Academy over this decision.

But while Voltaire had not interested him, with his unbelief in the church, the Count de St. Germain, ex-Minister of War to Louis XVI., present king, with his curious beliefs, his unexplained origin, his mystic associations, and his claims to have lived in successive generations through his wonderful Golden Elixir, combined with the stories that he had restored to youth and strength the old Duc de Richelieu many years before, under the previous king, Louis XV., and that he had been seen by many old people at various courts and under different kings, but always fresh and young—this interested Adrian's fancy, and excited his imagination.

He had likewise read with great interest the accounts of Frederick Antony Mesmer, the celebrated German physician who a few years before set Paris wild with his theories and his performances, and

although he had been unable to mesmerize Benjamin Franklin, the great defender of American liberty, then in Paris, and his theories had been rejected by the forty in the French Academy, still he had created such an enthusiasm as the French alone so spontaneously give, and Adrian remembered the occurrences well.

Then followed the excitement occasioned by the Count Cagliostro, the protege of Cardinal de Rohan, and the wonders told of his performances, even leaving Mesmer in the shade; whose travels in Egypt, Turkey and the Eastern countries, it was said, had discovered the philosopher's stone and who made gold at will, according to report, and whose mansion was visited by the highest noblesse of France.

But Cagliostro's brilliant career was suddenly cut short by the theft of the celebrated diamond necklace, in which he, the Cardinal de Rohan, and others were implicated, and were said to have obtained possession of the necklace, valued at a fortune of 1,800,000 livres, from the Court Jewelers, Boehmer & Bassange, and sent it to England for division, the name of the Queen, Marie Antoinette, being forged in order to obtain it.

Accounts of these and other peculiar people of the times had filled Adrian's leisure hours with much mystic reading, and well he remembered the awe with which he had gazed upon these personages, especially the Count de St. Germain.

This is a brief history of the two men rapidly nearing Versailles in the early morning hours.

"This is a strange world," suddenly said Adrian, breaking the silent reflection of his companion.

“There are many strange things in this life, and so unbelievable that man, who usually is willing to believe only in the commonplace, is sometimes compelled in spite of much fraud, to admit that many things are unexplainable to finite minds.

“The Earth, this strange world of ours, quakes beneath our feet, great chasms open, and yawning abysses stretch before our eyes where just before seemed solid ground. Mountains topple and fall to the level of the sandy plain, while from the plain arise new mountains toward the sky. Volcanoes open, and from their fiery throats belch forth an unstemmed torrent of sheeted flame. Aerolites spin from the blue vault of the sky, and striking deep in mother Earth, leave no tale of whence they came. Geysers spout forth at stated intervals from crevices, and sink away into the bowels of the Earth. Islands of ocean disappear, and new ones form.

“Man lives and dies, a temporary atom in a changing world. Races have come and gone, have left their works, and we know them not. They have fallen into the oblivion of the past, buried so deep we cannot resurrect their customs or their history.

“But man is the strangest phenomena of all, with his ambitions, his desires, his activity, his numerous petty ends to be gained, and the means he adopts to gain them. His various grades of intelligence, of passions, of beliefs. His unsatisfied, restless spirit, and above all, his four-fold nature, and his dual power, material and mental.

“Men know not what they are. Not one out of a thousand knows what constitutes that material body which in drudgery to the spirit passes daily before them. How curious its construction, how numerous

are its bones and cells, how intricate its various workings and its wonderful mechanism. How, then, is man to judge of that essence of life called mind, which he can neither see or feel, and therefore in his material way is unable to appreciate.

"Ah, Adrian, there are many of us learn after death that which we could not comprehend before. To some few it is given to discover the secrets of nature, and those few, in finite life, are far more unhappy than those whose knowledge is more limited."

"But you surely would not advise a mind that pants for wisdom to chain its ambitions down to Earth, and grovel with the lower herd in small desires and pettiness. No, rather let it ever seek new fields, though in so searching it becomes dissatisfied with all the world around," eagerly answered Adrian.

Minotti looked at him and sighed.

"Your fate is sealed," he said, "and you, too, will become a seeker after knowledge which never ends on Earth. Perhaps not hereafter. I would have saved you, but it was not to be. Only in after years, when your research has brought you all it can, and still the mind unceasing cries for more, while the tired body asks for quiet rest, then, Adrian, remember that Minotti warned you what the end would be. That satisfaction and content were not to be gained by delving into the mysterious forces of nature and of man."

"I will remember it, and yet I must go on, and ever on in knowledge and in power. But tell me, who are my enemies that hold sway over me, and how may I regain my own, my name, my wealth?"

"How may you regain that which is lost, and who

are your enemies? Ah, Adrian, I cannot tell you now the story, but some day you shall know. They are still powerful, very powerful. That much I know by sad experience," and Minotti relapsed into silence, as the cab rolled on.

CHAPTER III.

THE VEILED FIGURE OF ISIS IN THE CURTAINED CHAMBER.

The sun was rising as the cab stopped at the gateway of an ancient looking chateau, gabled and turreted as though a relic of feudal antiquity. The driveway which stretched forth to view had evidently long been disused, judging from the neglected appearance of the trees which lined it, and the patches of grass and weeds which grew luxuriantly over the roadway.

"We will alight here," said Minotti, "and then the cab can return without exciting the curiosity of any stray passer-by."

So they alighted, paid the triple fare, and as the driver whipped his horse toward Paris, the two late fares picked their way carefully along the once grand, but now deserted driveway, and were soon standing before the massive entrance to the chateau, or rather castle, for now as they gazed at its columns, its turrets, and terraces, and noted the strength of build and size of the edifice, it ranked in proportions to many of the famous feudal castles of the land.

"And do you call this the Chateau Balzac?" queried Adrian.

"Yes, since it was the wish of your father, and of his father before him. As you see, it originally was a magnificent structure, costly and grand, but your student ancestors paid more attention to learning

than to building, and improved their minds rather than their ancestral home. Consequently, not caring to keep up its grandeur as a castle, it was closed to the public, and much of it disused for several generations past, until it became known to the world as simply the Chateau Balzac, home of the recluse race, and among the poorer classes, as the abode of the devil. It is said there are suites of rooms here, that have not been opened to the light for over a century, owing to various events which occurred in them, and which rendered them distasteful to your race."

"Does no one stay here?"

"No one but Philip Hauton, a learned hunchback, and he only because, here, he is free from the jibes of the world, and can indulge in his favorite pastime to his heart's content."

"And what is that, and where is he?" queried Adrian rather impatiently.

"Here is one of his pets," said Minotti, and at that instant a hooded serpent slowly undulated through the weeds, and raised its head, looking at the intruders with blinking eyes and easy grace, as much as to say, "I am at home, but where are you."

Adrian grasped a handy club, and would have despatched the reptile forthwith, but Minotti stayed his arm, remarking:

"Do not kill it. It is not the fault of the serpent that it is here. This is simply one of the descendants of some reptile that your father fostered in his efforts to discover the law of nature by which they lie torpid during the winter. You will see others here, and they were all petted during your father's life. His son should not destroy them. Besides, Philip

would never forget or forgive you, and his confidence and help are necessary to the fulfillment of my task. He watches over the bodies of the Count and Countess, and as carefully tends the pets the Count left behind."

"Such pets as these are not to my liking," said Adrian, as the reptile having finished its survey, slowly moved away. "Are any of them poisonous?"

"Certainly, but a Balzac need never be afraid of a serpent. It is one of the hereditary gifts of your race to hold them in submission to your wishes."

"In other words we were a race of snake charmers," said Adrian, as though he deemed it anything but a compliment.

"Yes, if you so wish to call it," answered Minotti, "but here comes a herald which invariably announces the arrival of Philip," and as he spoke a beautiful raven flew over their heads and perched upon a bough within ten feet of where they stood, and almost immediately a man appeared upon the scene, and like the serpent, slowly raised his head and surveyed them.

It was no ordinary face which peered out from beneath those grey locks and broad, white hat, but it was a sad and melancholy one, at this moment. The eyes were black as night, and large and questioning. The face was shaven smooth, and showed many lines of thought and sorrow. The mouth was large and thin lipped, but handsome, and the chin was square and determined looking.

Withal, it might have been the face of a man of forty, or of fifty, or of sixty, and it certainly was the face of a scholar, whatever the age of its owner. The

head was large, resting above the drawn shoulders of a hunchback, for he was deformed, and this was the source of most of his grievances in life, and it had brought him much secret rebellion against his lot here. His arms and limbs looked longer than they really were, owing to his shortened body. He presented a queer, yet sad appearance, as he stood before them.

"Welcome, Minotti," said Philip, after a second's survey, "but who is the stranger, and why is he here? This is, as you know, a dangerous spot for strangers," and Philip laughed grimly, as he eyed Adrian.

"Good day, Philip," answered Minotti, "but this is no stranger to the Balzac race. M. Courcey, this is M. Hauton, savant and scholar, one of the friends of Count Balzac, and so a friend of yours by every right which governs friendship."

Philip advanced and cordially grasped the hand held out by Adrian, looking him squarely in the eyes as he did so, and saying :

"A friend of the Balzacs is ever a welcome guest here, at all hours and in all seasons ; but, pardon me, it seems that you are young to be a friend of a race the last scion of which must have disappeared ere you were born," and the black eyes questioned Adrian even more than the speech.

"True, I am young, and yet none have a better right to claim friendship with the Balzac race," replied Adrian a trifle proudly, for Philip's tone and eyes had nettled him somewhat.

"No offense, M. Courcey, was intended, but if you knew the various reasons offered by many who come here as mere curiosity seekers, and who strive by

every ruse to pierce the mystery surrounding this noble chateau, I am sure you would appreciate my natural distrust of all who enter here, save Minotti alone," returned Philip courteously. "His presence and introduction should have been sufficient for me in your case, and it is, so pardon the questioning tone, and the questioner," and as he spoke his dark eyes softened visibly, and their interrogating glance gave way to a more trusting expression, and yet a puzzled one, for Adrian certainly was young to be a friend of the Balzacs.

"Philip, my friend," said Minotti, whose attention had been engrossed with the surroundings rather than the speakers, "let us enter the chateau at once, as I have much to say to you, and Adrian and myself are both somewhat weary, after the night we have passed. Lead us to the curtained chamber first, as it is there you should be told. I feel it."

"What! Lead M. Courcey there?" cried Philip, showing astonishment in every feature.

"Ay, there, and then to the very heart of the crypt itself, and let him stand beside the sarcophagus and gaze upon the features of the living dead," responded Minotti, calmly, while at every word Philip's countenance grew darker, and at the last he quietly folded his long arms across his breast, and said:

"No, Minotti. Not even for you shall I expose the secrets of this chateau to a stranger's gaze. In all these years Count Balzac's strange secret has been safe with myself, and I suppose with you, but if you stand ready now to betray your trust, I do not," and his tones were sad, but firm.

"You shall know all presently," replied Minotti. "Do you remember what day this is?"

Philip started, scrutinized first Minotti, and then Adrian, closely, and without a word of distrust said simply :

“Follow me.”

And together they entered a side door of the building, and were ushered into first a sort of ante chamber, through which they passed into a long and wide hall, which in turn led into a greater hall, running lengthwise of the building.

These large halls were misty and dark, there being no light in the first save that reflected from a mirror opposite it in the second, and on entering the large hall, the only light there proved to be subdued, springing from a peculiar shaped lamp, which hung from the frescoed ceiling in the form of a five pointed star, from each tip of which sprung a faint light, just sufficient to enable the eyes of Adrian to distinguish the beautiful outlines of many objects of vertu and art. Paintings, with which the walls were lined. Armored figures, seemingly, with helmeted heads, and visiers closed, solemnly standing guard in the great hallway at regular intervals along the walls. Here hung a silken banner, tasseled and fringed, with a gilded inscription upon it that could not be deciphered in the darkness, and there, dimly outlined in the centre, stood a beautiful fountain, in the form of Aphrodite, gracefully leaning over the basin beneath and admiring her beautiful figure in the mimic ocean.

Quickly they passed by these and many other objects which at another time Adrian would have stopped to admire, but Philip strode on ahead rapidly, and Minotti came next with a step as firm and quick, and Adrian needs must follow.

Suddenly Philip turned, and they followed him up a grand stairway which led with easy steps to the floor above. Reaching it, Philip struck a match, and finding a taper, lit it, and led the way to the rear of the hallway, similar to the first, but not so grand. Arriving at the end, they passed through a door which Philip opened with an odd-shaped key, and they found themselves in another but much narrower hall, which seemed to wind around in a circle as they passed along, for at times Philip and the taper would be lost to sight around the curve. At last a curtained door was reached, and here Philip abruptly stopped, and waited for his companions to reach his side, which they did almost instantly.

"Enter here," said Philip, and Adrian, who had hung back by some indefinable sentiment of dread, did as he was bidden, and found himself in one of the most peculiar apartments which he had ever seen. It appeared to be circular, and yet, no, it was elliptical, and hung on every hand with dark, forbidding curtains. Not a spot on wall or ceiling but was covered with them. They were rich in texture, and seemingly worked in peculiar figures, with the sacred Ibis, the horned Apis and pyramids here and there, at irregular and seemingly grotesque intervals.

In the center of the room stood a pedestal, and upon this a veiled figure of a woman. The floor was made of blocks of stone, fitted together in triangular shapes. There were no chairs or other furniture in the room, and as he looked around Adrian felt again that peculiar sensation of dread that had affected him momentarily at the entrance.

All the companions quietly stood a moment after entering as if no one cared to break the dread silence

of that chamber, and then Minotti slowly said, while he crossed his arms over his breast:

"Let the test be made. Adrian, draw that silken cord which hangs beside the figure. Pull it firmly. Have no fear, and if indeed your spirit is that of a Balzac, and you wish to penetrate the mysteries of life and knowledge, know that here is the beginning. What may happen, or what we will see, I know not, but for the first time in twenty long years, I bid another draw the silken cord of the curtained room."

And as his voice ceased, the fire of youth and desire flashed into Adrian's eyes, and he stepped lightly forward and drew the silken cord with a firm hand and a beating heart.

As he drew, the curtains parted in front of them, and slowly rolled away to either side, and before them, as in a dream, appeared a vision of rolling clouds, one above the other, and as far as the eye could reach there was nothing visible but clouds. Soon there emerged from among them a floating speck, small at first, but gradually growing larger and larger as atom after atom of seeming gaseous substance separated themselves from among the clouds, and joined the growing ball. Larger and larger it grew, more and more atoms rushed toward and joined it, and now it was quite a round sphere, hanging and revolving in space, while above and around and about it clustered many clouds, but none silver tipped, all dark.

Suddenly the scene faded away, and in its place there appeared a beautiful light, soft at first, and tender, as from a single star, then growing brighter and brighter as one star after another shone forth from the dark background beyond, and soon the

the scene was one shifting panorama of stars circling around in a never ending circle. And each star appeared to be an atom, similar to those seen before, save that they were larger, and were illuminated by an all-powerful light coming, it seemed, from above and beyond them.

Then the large ball again appeared, sailing in space, save that now it, too, was illuminated, and shone with a reflected light upon the scene. And other similar worlds appeared, each shining as the first, and beyond them and around them shone the stars, and the clouds floated about each separate ball, or world, save that now they were silver tipped and golden, not dark and forbidding as before. And as the scene closed the veiled figure spoke:

"Seeker after knowledge, Neophyte, this is how the world began, beyond the ken of mortal man, millions of years ago."

The scene again changed, and before them stretched a sandy plain, and out of the plain there sprang a tree, slowly rising heavenward. And other trees arose, and far in the background a fierce flame shot its fiery tongues upward, never ceasing. And the veiled figure spoke:

"The heat of the flame generates the seed of the tree in the warm Earth. The flame can build as well as destroy."

And now a forest has appeared, covered with trees and flora, and then a tiny insect, small at first and insignificant, is seen upon a little leaf. And this insect drops to Earth, and changes gradually to an animal, a new and strange one to Adrian, not such as are now seen upon Earth. With neither legs or tail or symmetry, it was a sluggish thing, which remained

quite still and passive for a moment until suddenly it too, changed and became animal after animal, and finally it gradually grew to be a man, and stood among the foliage like a wild beast, and grasped a tree for support. And the veiled figure spoke :

“Behold, one of the children of men, how small the beginning from whence you sprang. Warmed by the flame of the Earth into existence, and as yet without a mind.”

And now again the scene varied, and by the side of the man a woman stood, fair and beautiful, and wound her arms about the man and kissed him, and then they tenderly caressed each other and slowly walked away into the shadowing curtain of the foliage, and were lost to view in the forest and the flowers. And again the veiled figure spoke :

“Human love has dawned upon the Earth. Now the sorrows of mankind begin.”

And from among the trees other beings appeared, one by one, and two by two, until there was quite a band of them, and men and women were mingling together, when suddenly a great commotion occurred and another brighter being appeared, endowed with mind and reason. And he straightway walked to the finest looking of the women, and kissed her, and she wound her arms about him, and followed him, while those she left fought among themselves at her loss. And the veiled figure spoke :

“This is Lilith, a daughter of the Earth flame, who forsook the children of men to enter a life of love with Adam, a son of the All Powerful Intelligence.”

Then the scene changed, and upon a barren plain, cast off and deserted, lay Lilith and her infant boy,

beautiful still, but sorrowing. Loving, yet hating, herself and child deserted by Adam, cast out of the heart of the man she loved, and driven forth into the world, torn with the pangs of jealousy and lashed with memories of a love once dear, but now forgotten. And the veiled figure spoke:

“The first fruits of human love on Earth led to wretchedness. Beware of it, Neophyte, if thou would safely tread the path of knowledge.”

Once more the scene shifted, and now the skies were black and lowering. Lightning flashed from cloud to cloud, and thunder pealed incessantly. Before their gaze foamed a broad and grand ocean, stretching mile upon mile along a noble coast, lined with beautiful cities, and far inland could be seen other towns. The mad ocean was lashed to fury by the violence of the storm, and hither and thither the billows rolled in tumultuous confusion. The black sky belched forth its wrath in stroke after stroke of fiery flame, and seemed determined now or never to drive the grand ocean from its moorings and scatter it into space. But the waters angrily leaped skyward at each threatening thunderbolt and strove to drag the wrathful clouds into their foamy embrace.

It was a frightful war of the elements, an upheaval of nature, and suddenly a glare of blinding light shot over the scene, and high upon the crest of a wonderful wave appeared a tiny boat, floating over the angry waters like a charmed thing of life which feared not surrounding death.

Another glare shot athwart the scene in blinding brilliancy, and in the boat on the mountainous wave crest appeared two faces, both of women, both lovely, but how different. One wore upon her head

a golden crown, tipped with a blazing sun, and her face was dark and her look commanding as she bade defiance to the elements.

The other was the face of the lady of the portrait, sweet, angelic, tearful, entreating, and involuntarily Minotti and Adrian uttered a cry and bounded forward, but at that moment the clouds dipped to the ocean with a fearful crash, the waves foamed and churned, and rose higher, and higher still, and by the fierce glare of a sudden lightning flash, it was seen that the shore, and the cities, and the grand temples, and the continent had disappeared beneath the raging waters. And again the veiled figure spoke:

“Lemuria, the great—Lemuria, the land of the Titans—has fallen to the sea, and the waters cover her. A continent has disappeared with all its teeming millions of life and of wealth. But Lilith, Priestess of the Sun, is saved, and with her Eve, her fair and beautiful rival. Soon they shall sleep to wake again in new and successive lives in centuries yet to come. Beware of Lilith, beware of Eve. See where a hundred centuries later they roamed, and follow them not.”

Once more the scene changed, and now a new planet, another world appeared, and by its wonderful rings they knew that it was Saturn which floated in space before them. Suddenly the beautiful planet divided, and a lovely valley appeared, with trees and flowers upon the one hand, and upon the other side an exceedingly rough and mountainous country, filled with craters, and living and extinct volcanoes, and lava. And there, high upon the cone of a mountain's peak, hand in hand, stood Lilith, wearing her crown of the blazing sun, and Eve, sweet, tender,

pleading as of old, by her side. And the watchers stood spellbound for a moment while the veiled figure again spoke :

“Beware of Lilith. Beware of Eve.”

And the scene faded away and the curtains slowly rolled back to their places. Adrian suddenly fell forward unconscious, and his companions tenderly raised him, and themselves weak and trembling, carried him out into the circular hallway, and around and down into the main hall on the first floor, and laid him to rest on a divan, while they chafed his hands by the dim light of the star lamp, and slowly brought him back to consciousness. But Philip had whispered to Minotti, ere he awoke :

“This is surely a Balzac. Why did you not tell me?”

“The curtained room could prove it to you better,” was the sad reply.

Adrian slowly opened his eyes, and as they rested upon his companions, closed them again with a deep sigh, saying :

“I thought I had found her, but you recall me to life. Let me rest here, for I am tired, so tired of all I ever knew before,” and as he spoke, he slept.

And Philip and Minotti each sought repose upon divans close by, and for a time watched the regular breathing of Adrian, and then they, too, fell into slumber.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SECRET CRYPT AND ITS OCCUPANTS.

Hour after hour vanished and still the sleepers stirred not, for the events of the night and morning just passed had taxed the mental strength of all. None sleep sounder than those whose minds are weary, for sleep is the natural restorer of mental strength as well as physical.

But they slept not alone, for coiled beside the feet of Philip lay a large and beautiful python, which ever and anon raised its head and looked at the sleepers, as if on guard over their slumbers. Its eyes appeared to linger curiously about Adrian, and with almost speaking intelligence in their gaze. At times the serpent seemed sorrowful, and drooped its head to the floor in apparent anguish, and then again its eyes would flash with anger, and it would gaze around as if seeking something upon which to vent its rage. But its passion would die away when it glanced at Adrian's features, and again its head would droop with sorrow.

The sun was setting, but no ray glinted into the hall of the chateau, and the star lamp still shed its soft light over them, when Philip stirred uneasily, and opened his eyes dreamily. A moment more and he was sitting upright and gazing at the others, and especially at the python and the sorrowful droop of its graceful head.

"What is it, Karnac? What troubles you?" and

as he spoke, Philip stroked the mottled neck of the python kindly. But the serpent stirred not, and Philip soon desisted, and concluded to awake his companions, which he did with little difficulty.

Adrian arose from the divan, looked wonderingly about for a moment, and then said :

"Ah, I remember. We are in the chateau. I thought we had all gone to search for the lost into another world, but we are still here, and it was a dream, nothing more, but—heavens!—what is this?" and he gazed wonderingly at the python, which now had raised its head and was looking him full in the face.

"It is nothing but Karnac, an old friend of the Balzacs, since it is said he was here a generation ago, and came from Asia with your great ancestor, Leo Balzac, half a century since. Have no fear of him. A more faithful servitor the Balzacs never knew. I am surprised that he is here, however, as his place is usually at the foot of the sarcophagus."

"Ah, yes, the sarcophagus. Let us visit it at once," cried Adrian. "I must see the bodies of my father and of her—my mother. When shall we start?"

"As soon as you please," said Minotti, "but first let us eat after our long fast, for if I am not mistaken, the day is past and night is at hand," and he looked at his timepiece as he spoke.

"True, we have fasted, and should eat, but my impatience scarcely can await the ending of the meal. So let us hasten and finish it. Then to the sarcophagus," cried Adrian.

"Aye, then to the sarcophagus," rejoined Minotti.

Philip led the way, and soon they reached a small ante chamber, dimly lighted with a swinging lamp,

and from a massive sideboard, wine, fruit, meat and cakes were taken. Soon a meal was temptingly spread before the three, and they sat hungrily down to satiate the cravings of animal nature. The meal progressed in silence, until Adrian suddenly turned his head and said :

“ Tell me, Minotti, why does the python follow us? See, there he is, and strangely enough, is watching me closely.”

Minotti turned, looked at the serpent, and then gave Philip a glance full of meaning, as much as to say : “ You see, another proof.” Turning to Adrian he simply said :

“ Karnac admits your superiority, that is all. With him you can do as you will. He has been free for years, since Count Balzac entered upon his last experiment, but now he is again a subject of the Balzac influence.”

“ What mean you, Minotti? Have I this influence without exercising it.”

“ No. You do exercise it, but not knowingly. Many do likewise. You probably could not control every serpent without exercising your gift more, but Karnac has been so accustomed to it in the past, that he feels it more readily now, and your simple presence tells him he is again in the influence of his master. If you will it, he will leave you or stay with you, or will enter fire or water for you. If in danger from physical sources, and his power could save you, will it, and he will surmount any difficulty possible to reach your enemy. Faithful unto death is Karnac to you now, as he has been to your race. They have cared kindly for him. Do you the same.”

For the first time Adrian regarded the python

with interest, and noted its graceful beauty and apparent strength. It was quite a large one of its kind, and apparently some twenty feet in length. A powerful protector, at times, it would seem, if necessary.

"Karnac knows you well, M. Hauton?" queried Adrian.

"Very well, for years," replied Philip.

"Call him to you, I would examine him more closely," said Adrian.

Philip softly whistled, but the python stirred not. Then he called, "Karnac, Karnac," but still no answering movement.

"Your power is complete, M. Courcey. Karnac would not thus treat me, unless you willed it," and Philip seemed a trifle hurt.

Adrian quickly repeated Philip's whistle call, and before its sound had died away the python was at his side, while Philip said:

"There is no need for you to call him by whistling. Simply will it, he will come. With me the call was necessary. With you the wish is sufficient. Karnac is your absolute slave. He was only my friend, and friendship counts for naught beside the power you exercise over him. If you should will it so, he would encircle me, his friend for years, in his close embrace and crush me without compunction. If you have never known what it is to be an absolute master, you know it now, so far as Karnac is concerned at least."

The python lowered its head and seemingly fell asleep by Adrian's side, its eyes closing, and its general attitude one of rest and quiet. "How powerful a protector it would be in time of need," thought

Adrian, as his eyes dwelt upon the strong and muscular proportions trailing upon the floor.

"Tell, me," he said aloud, after his survey, "has Karnac been put to the test, and his powers tried in defense of our race?"

"Several times," rejoined Philip. "Notice the scar along his body, seemingly a cut that is healed. That was dealt him by a vicious sword thrust, which well nigh ended his existence, but he would not yield, and finally wound his folds about the man and crushed him to death. That man was one of the enemies of your house, and had entered the chateau at night to murder Count Balzac, it was supposed. Be that as it may, his body was found next morning, and by it lay Karnac sorely wounded. Possibly had it not been for the wound, the man's body might have been swallowed by the python. As it was, the bones were broken and the body crushed out of all semblance to the original man."

"Who was this man?" queried Adrian.

"He was a charlatan by practice, a Brahmin out-cast by the force of circumstances, and a daring, dangerous adept in reality."

"Why did he desire to kill the Count?"

"Partially for revenge, and some think he had another motive," slowly answered Philip, as his eyes sought his plate.

"And what was this other motive?" queried Adrian.

"Be not angry, Adrian," interrupted Minotti, "and I will tell you what Philip and I know. His principal motive was love for the Countess," and Minotti's eyelids dropped, for he felt Adrian's hot glance upon him as he spoke.

"Did all who saw her love her, then, even this barbarian," cried Adrian, angrily.

"No. Not all, M. Courcey," said Philip, sadly, "but many paid her that compliment unavoidably, though wishing otherwise. As for him, he was not a barbarian, but a deep and learned man, and so much the more dangerous."

"When did this occur?" said Adrian.

"More than twenty-five years ago," answered Philip.

"I should have thought he would have known better than to enter the chateau at night, and Karnac about," mused Adrian.

"He had power over serpents himself, and probably thought he could control Karnac. But it is well he could not," and Minotti set his teeth sternly together as he spoke. "But come, the meal is finished, and now let us explore the sarcophagus, and the pyramid where it rests. Lead on, Philip, and remember that the true heir of the Balzac race follows you."

Phillip arose, went to a panel in the wall, pressed a spring, and brought forth first a censer, and then a curious lamp, evidently of Egyptian origin, for it represented the sacred crocodile, in miniature, its body forming the cup, and from its mouth the flame appeared, Philip lighting the wick. Then he arose, and simply saying :

"Follow me carefully," he led the way out into the hall, and stopped suddenly before an open panel.

"Ah, so this is how Karnac came," he said, and then he glided into the recess, and bade the others follow him.

They stepped to his side, and found themselves in a small chamber, at one end of which an open door disclosed a flight of winding stone steps which seemed to end in total darkness in the depths below.

Philip again bade them be careful, and lighting the incense in the censer, swung it in one hand while he held the lamp in the other, and then he led the way down the circular stair case, the others following.

Looking behind, Adrian saw Karnac slowly following them. "My future body guard," he thought.

Down they went, round and round and still deeper, and it seemed the stairs would never end. They were not difficult to descend, however, and at times the lamp and censer would disappear around the curve, and Adrian would quicken his steps and again catch sight of the hunchback form leading on—to where?

Finally, after what seemed an hour or two of descent to the excited Adrian, they arrived at the foot of the stairway, and quickly entered the open door, or archway of stone, and there Philip stopped reverently a moment, saying:

"Look about you, and when your eyes are accustomed to the dim light, you will see the most wonderful of all the Chateau Balzac's mysteries, the tomb of the last of your race the world has known."

Adrian looked, and looming before his vision he saw a slanting wall of solid masonry, which appeared to grow smaller toward the top, lost in the distance and the shadow beyond.

"I see the slanting pyramid," he said, "and yet, I cannot see the top of it."

"Follow me," said Philip, and they passed around to the other side of the pyramid, and there they

found a door, or aperture, a little way from the ground.

Philip seized a ladder which lay near, and bidding Minotti hold the lamp and censer, he climbed to the entrance, and bade them follow him. Reaching his side, they entered a narrow hall, and together, single file, walked down an inclined path of solid masonry, while all around were square blocks of stone fitted close together, forming the roof and sides.

Soon they arrived in an open chamber, and then Philip lit a large lamp, which hung from the ceiling in the shape of a crab, and a scene of beauty presented itself to their gaze.

The walls of this strange room were hung with rich curtains of heavy material, embroidered in gold, which sparkled and shone in the lamplight. Here was embroidered the sacred bull, Apis, and there Ra, the sun, shone forth in golden splendor from its dark background. The stars and the moon were represented, and curious hieroglyphics and signs were portrayed. There a golden crocodile reposed, and here a veiled female figure Isis, stood forth mystically from the shadows of the curtains. Hanging just above the lamp was a curtain containing the well known features of Sesostris, carved in ivory, and looking sternly and silently down upon the scene below.

Around the walls stood mummy case after mummy case, whose handsomely carved exteriors and burnished brass and gilt faces plainly denoted the high rank of some of the occupants of these ancient coffins. In the center of the room, resting upon solid blocks of stone, laid a large and elegant sarcophagus, made of Egyptian porphyry, carved with

numerous figures and inscriptions, upon the outside. The handsomely carved lid was not placed upon it, but rested by its side upon the floor, and as Adrian looked he saw behind the sarcophagus the folds of Karnac's body, for he was there.

"See, here is the python," wonderingly said Adrian.

"This is his usual resort," answered Philip, "and he arrived before us through a shorter passage, built for his convenience by the Count."

Passing around to the head of the sarcophagus, Philip bade the others wait a moment, and then, lifting a veil from the top of the receptacle, said impressively:

"Behold that which I guard. Count Balzac, look upon the features of your ancestors, who are dead, yet living. Dead to all the world save you, Minotti and myself. None save ourselves have gazed upon the contents of this sarcophagus for twenty years, now past and gone."

With a quick bound Adrian reached Philip's side, and gazed spellbound at the beautiful vision before him. He had eyes for but one of the two figures reclining in restful peace before his gaze, and that was the Countess.

There she lay, seemingly but fallen asleep a little while, her sweet lips parted in a half smile, her eyes closed dreamily, the color of life in her rounded cheeks and in the full tint of her complexion. One rounded arm was thrown carelessly over the form of her companion, while the fingers clasped a small vinaigrette, as though it had but just been used.

The dress was of white silk, rich, pure and elegant, fitting closely to the throat, as if jealous of disclos-

ing the smallest part of her finely moulded figure. A brilliant solitaire diamond scintillated in the light from a single ring, and two large pearls hung as ear-drops. A turquoise brooch was clasped at her throat, and a jeweled fan lay carelessly beside her. The tip of one small, elegantly slippered foot, peeped from below the embroidered ruffle of the dress, and the picture was one of sleeping modesty, of pure, charming, lovely womanhood, in quiet peaceful slumber.

At her side, dark skinned and dark featured, lay the Count. His lips were sternly set as if the purpose of his life hung in the balance ere he went to sleep. His face was refined and full of character. It was the face of a student, of a seeker, of a man who would dare all in pursuit of an idea. His dark moustache lay curling over his mouth, as if to shield its sternness and its strength. His sinewy form reposed naturally and restfully, as though slumber had set her seal upon it lightly, and its owner might awake at any moment. His eyes were closed, and one almost expected to see them open, and the Count arise at once for action in the busy scenes of life. One hand was carelessly thrown across the other, and the spotless cuffs shone white and clear against his jet black suit, while his dark locks lay in negligent confusion upon the blue satin pillow, in strong contrast to the golden and beautiful hair of his wife. The complexion and color were lifelike to a startling degree, and the whole aspect of the two figures seemed to thoroughly impress Adrian with slumber, not with death.

Minotti slowly advanced and stood gazing at the scene, emotions of love and hate playing alternately over his usually mobile, self-contained countenance.

"The same," he muttered, "just the same. When will it end?"

Adrian started from his rapt attention at the words, and gazed awe-stricken at the speaker. Then he turned to Philip, who with a concentrated gaze of love and sorrow was regarding the Countess.

Suddenly Minotti exclaimed:

"I will awaken her, I must see her once again alive. This is torture unbearable," and he sprang a step forward and raised one of the hands of the Countess to his lips.

For a moment Adrian turned white with rage, and his eyes flashed as he drew back to strike the grey head bent over the uplifted hand. But Philip caught his arm in a grip of iron, and fairly hissed:

"Hold! Remember where you are, and who he is. Think but for he and I what would become of them."

Adrian's temper was up, and he struggled to free his arm from Philip's grasp, but it was useless. Both his arms were gripped by Philip, and he was held fast, while Minotti's head was still bowed over that delicate hand of the beautiful sleeper.

Suddenly Adrian's gaze became riveted upon Karnac, his struggles with Philip ceased, and half in terror, half in joy, he willed the python to try his strength with Minotti. The great serpent gracefully obeyed the secret command, and the next instant wound himself about the limbs of the seemingly unconscious man. Round and round he coiled, and now his length has well-nigh encircled the loins of the priest, and his eyes are snapping dangerously previous to giving a final deadly hug, when Philip cried:

"Save Minotti! He is not himself, but entranced!"

And not a moment too soon Adrian willed the python to desist, and as he slowly unwound his length from Minotti's form, and slid to the floor, Philip released Adrian, jumped forward and caught Minotti, carefully and reverently took the hand of the Countess, and laid it beside her, and turned the priest's face toward Adrian and the light. There was no sign of intelligence in the glassy, staring eyes, and the pliant limbs appeared to obey only the motion given to them by Philip. Minotti was indeed entranced, or his reason had fled. Which?

Philip and Adrian at this unexpected catastrophe, looked terrified each at the other, and then gazed around, seeking the cause.

On the floor lay Karnac, blinking lazily. Around them the dark curtains hung as before. Beside them lay that elegant sarcophagus, and pictured clearly against its satin lining reclined the figures of the Count and Countess. Seemingly there was no cause for Minotti's condition, and yet his body was supported by Philip, as pliable as that of the Count himself, and with as little animation.

What was the cause?

Suddenly Philip uttered an exclamation, and carefully laying the body of Minotti down, felt for the pulse. There was none. Next he felt for the beating of the heart. It had ceased. Very quietly Philip arose, and gazed upon the body. After a long scrutiny, during which time Adrian seemed stunned, Philip looked again carefully upon the reclining bodies in the sarcophagus.

"Ah," he exclaimed, and reaching down, he raised Minotti's hand which had held that of the Countess. In it lay the vinaigrette, but seemingly closed.

"Perhaps this will explain it," he said, and taking the vinaigrette he looked carefully at it. It was not open, but a pungent odor left the impression that it had been closed but a few moments, at most. Philip pocketed the article, and reverently covered the bodies with the veiling. Then he said:

"Count Balzac, take the censer and the lamp. Lead on, and I will follow with Minotti. We must leave here ere the incense is exhausted, or I will not answer for the result. One has met with misfortune. Others may before we reach the top of the secret staircase. Let us hasten, for the spirit of evil seems abroad to-night."

And suiting the action to the words, he gathered the inert form of Minotti in his strong arms, and Adrian mechanically took the lamp and censer, and without another look, they left the chamber, reached the rocky passage, and then the aperture. Adrian here assisted Philip to descend with the body to the foot of the ladder, and they stood at the bottom of the spiral staircase a few seconds later. Here the most difficult part began, for Minotti was no light burden, and strong as he was, Philip had to rest every few steps, and take breath.

They took turns at carrying Minotti's body, but it was slow work, and ere they reached the top it was plain the incense and the light might both become exhausted. On they toiled, working manfully, the perspiration dripping from every pore, and still they were far from the top.

"Can we but put the secret panel between us and the tomb ere the incense burns out, all will be well," gasped Philip, as he struggled upward with his burden.

"But already it begins to grow fainter in the censer," cried Adrian, as he swung it upon his arm, and grasping Minotti with his free hand, step by step they toiled up the rocky stairs.

Would they never end? Was this turning, spiral dungeon, this winding, snake-like—

"Ah," gasped Adrian, and he willed Karnac to appear.

And soon below them, while the incense grew faint in the censer, they could hear the rustle and swish of the coming python. Closer and closer came the serpent, nearer and nearer sounded his coming, and fainter and fainter grew the smoke of the incense in the censer. Soon Karnac's head appeared around the curve, and now he is beside them. Suddenly he stopped, and at Adrian's suggestion the priest's girdle was put into Karnac's mouth, and as he raised the body clear of the steps, the two companions assisted the powerful python in carrying it, and together they mounted the stairway, and were soon at the entrance, and the secret panel. But none too early, for as they reached it the incense died away in the censer, and a ringing voice just behind them exclaimed:

"Once again, Karnac, have you defeated Lal Dhur, but it will not always be thus."

And a mocking laugh echoed and re-echoed down the rock-hewn stairs, and finally died away in the distance below.

The secret panel was finally shut, and with gasping breath and pale faces, Philip and Adrian stared into each other's eyes, by the pale light of the Egyptian lamp.

CHAPTER V.

THE SHADOWS GATHER ROUND THE SEARCHERS.

"Who is Lal Dhur?" asked Adrian with a shiver.

"He is the Brahmin outcast priest, whom Karnac destroyed," answered Philip, shuddering visibly, "and I fear now that this is his handiwork," pointing to the prostrate form of Minotti, which by this time they had raised upon a divan close at hand.

"But he has been dead for twenty-five years," gasped Adrian.

"Yes, his mortal body died then, but his revengeful spirit lives on and on. Being remarkably wicked, and naturally belonging to the baser elements of nature, his base spirit clings to Earth instead of soaring to the higher fields beyond where spirits of greater, nobler aspirations go. He loved life here, not existence hereafter, and as he was an outcast here from the better class of humanity, so he is an outcast there from the better spirits, and wanders back to Earth."

"And what has he done to Minotti to-night?" queried Adrian, aghast.

"That I know not. Since he could do no bodily harm save by impressing others to do it, I judge he impressed Minotti to inhale the contents of the vinaigrette, when he held the Countess' hand. He may have impressed him to first take the hand, and then impressed you to anger and to use Karnac against Minotti. It would have been sweet revenge indeed for Lal Dhur to know that Minotti perished

in the same pythonic embrace that crushed himself, and have been there to see it.

"You speak as though he could see, as mortals do, and feel as mortals feel. That he could hate, or love, be revenged, or satisfied, as we are."

"And so he can. It is the spirit which feels, sees, loves, hates, and not the body, and the death of the body simply sets the spirit free, but does not change it in any other respect."

Meanwhile they placed Minotti's inert body upon a divan in the main hallway, and were endeavoring to restore some animation to the pliant limbs by rubbing them briskly. It was, however, to no purpose, and they soon desisted.

"There is one sure way to discover what is best to be done," said Philip, slowly, "and only one that I know of."

"What is that way?" answered Adrian, "let us try it at once."

"It is to consult the veiled oracle in the curtained chamber," replied Philip.

"Think you the figure could tell?" wonderingly asked Adrian.

"Aye. For long years it has told your race the most hidden secrets, and tradition has it that this same figure told the Pharaohs of Egypt events of the past and future, thousands of years ago, in the grand temple of Isis, at Thebes. Also, that it stood in the Serapeum, at Alexandria, in a later age, and was daily consulted by the priests of Serapis there. It is a wonderful figure, and strangely enough, gives nothing at all to the many, and everything to a few of those who seem to possess a certain power or attraction for it."

"And do you possess that power?" queried Adrian.

"No, but you do, as has been proven," replied Philip. The figure has been as silent as any carved image ever since your father's absence. Neither Minotti or myself have been able to extract a sound from it, or obtain anything whatever in the curtained chamber. But you can, at will."

"Have you then tried and failed to get any results, and Minotti, too?"

"Yes, but finally we gave it up, and until you entered it, the curtained chamber has not been visited for fifteen years, at least."

"How strange," mused Adrian. "Have you ever examined this figure?"

"Yes, and had it apart. It is nothing but a handsomely executed ebony figure of the veiled Isis. A mannikin, which some master sculptor or artisan of great skill has carved. It has organs of speech, of hearing, of sight, fashioned minutely after those of man, but that is all. It of course has no digestive or life giving organs, as it needs none. It can talk, when properly controlled, and by the right person, can evidently see and hear also. It is said that the spirit of Mizraim endows it with prophetic powers, and that this spirit awakens only to those few who properly are re-incarnations of Mizraim's family."

"Where was this wonderful figure found, and how came it in possession of our race?" inquired Adrian.

"It is a long story, but the simple facts are that it was buried in a cave, with the hieroglyphic of the Royal House of Ra inscribed upon it, and on the mummy cases around it. This cave was finally discovered by wandering Arabs, near the Ramesseum,

at Thebes. The figure and its value were unknown for years, and it passed through many hands, being sold and resold simply as a wonderful piece of mechanism and a curiosity.

"Finally it fell into the hands of Lal Dhur, who discovered its worth, its purpose, and spent several years in tracing the image, deciphering its hieroglyphics and locating its age. He sold it to the Brahmins of Bombay, who placed it in the old cave temple of Karli, as an oracle, and then, as he alone could elicit responses from it, he was elected to remain with it as the highest priest. He stole it, and fled, after being detected in using his knowledge for evil ends, and then fell in with your father at Damascus, and sold it to him. Doubtless he intended to steal and resell it, had not his career been cut short by Karnac.

"He called the figure Tuaa, said it had been made by the early priests of Egypt as an oracle for their famous secret order, and that it represented Isis, but descending to Rameses II., the Great Pharaoh, he called it Tuaa, in honor of his royal mother. He also said that owing to special prayers offered by the priests, Mizraim's spirit had descended upon it, and it became an oracle when one of Mizraim's descendants awoke the latent spirit. This is the nucleus of the story of the veiled image of Isis in the curtained chamber."

"Let us then return to the chamber at once," cried Adrian, "and solve this mystery surrounding Minotti if possible."

"First let me tell you that the curtained chamber is directly over the tomb you visited, that the figure stands immediately above the apex of the pyramid,

and that there is a secret connection between it and the tomb. So the influences that may be at work in the depths below, have communication directly with the curtained chamber above. Should we visit there now, with the evil influence of Lal Dhur fully aroused, some catastrophe may overtake us, as it has Minotti. I simply warn you to beware, that is all, in visiting the curtained chamber."

"But what of the bodies below? Are they at the mercy of Lal Dhur?" queried Adrian, with anxiety in every tone.

"They are safe from all such evil shades. However powerful they are over others, no impression can be produced upon the Count and Countess. They are protected doubly, and though the shades may flock around the standard of Lal Dhur by thousands, still they cannot impress or bring harm to those upon whose resting place has been set the seal of King Solomon, and one of whom in life was a true follower of the Rosy Cross.

"And did not Minotti follow the teachings of the Rosicrucians?"

"Yes, in part, but failed when it came to the supreme test. Though a learned man, and a great one, Minotti could never reach the heights attained by Count Jules Balzac. Consequently he suffers, and is himself controlled at times by those he would command. Had it been otherwise, he would not now be lying here before us, but masterful, and defying the power of the impotent Linga Sharira, as did the Count. For previous to his last experiment Lal Dhur tried his powers often upon the Count and failed."

"Has he tried them upon you?" questioned Adrian.

"At times, but not so far successfully," answered Philip, his eyes gleaming and his lips closing with a firmer set. "How soon I may be overcome cannot be told. Surely not so long as I guard the bodies faithfully, and employ the proper means of resistance."

"And those means. What are they?" queried Adrian earnestly.

"A firm will, to begin with, which defies the power of those who would master the spirit; and secondly, knowledge by whom and how the influences are directed against me, and the use of preventives, such for instance, as the incense you saw me burn in the censer.

"But come, let us fathom the trance of Minotti, and the power which threw him into it. Come to the curtained chamber."

And Philip picked up the censer, went to the recess where he first obtained it, filled it with incense, lit the lamp, swung them both before him, and stood before Adrian, his dark eyes flashing, and his demeanor one of defiance to all, known and unknown.

"Are you ready?" he cried.

"Aye," bravely answered Adrian. "Let us go to the chamber, and at once."

Carefully arranging the body of Minotti upon the divan, and with one last look to see that all was safe below, they mounted once more the noble stairway, and were soon at the entrance of the chamber. Here Philip lit the incense, and they entered.

The chamber was as dark and forbidding as before. Nothing save the black curtains, the pedestal and the veiled figure were to be seen, and the rays of the lamp and the delicate smoke of the incense

seemed to softly and carefully steal over the apartment, as though partaking of the dread anxiety of the hour.

Suddenly, without a flicker, and as if snuffed by human hand, the light went out, and they were in total darkness, while from around the figure and seemingly far below, they could hear a sound as of a coming storm as it rises through the pine clad forest.

The sough of the wind as it rose and fell through the pine cones and needles, the sudden swish of an angry breath, as it impatiently awaited the coming of its master, the rising tempest, and the low lullaby of the tenderer breeze seemed painfully near, as Philip clutched his companion's hand, and whispered:

"As I feared, Lal Dhur and his minions are abroad to-night in full company. We should not have ventured here till they had subsided and scattered to the winds of forgetfulness from whence they came. The very air is thick with their dread influence. I feel it slowly, gradually descending upon us like a pall of death. It will be a test of strength this hour, or I am mistaken. Do not stir, but bend your will to one end, and that defiance to all, come those who may. They would enthrall your senses, drive your mind forth from its home, and wreck your chance for futurity if possible, sending your spirit forth to wander o'er this Earth as theirs, without the power to rise above it into higher spheres."

Nearer and nearer came the rush of the storm. It seemed to be gradually changing into a furious gale as it approached the chamber, and Adrian could distinctly feel the rocky floor tremble at its coming.

"Be brave, and fear not," whispered Philip. "Stand where you are, I will be with you in a moment," and his hand loosed that of Adrian, who could feel that his companion was moving near him in the darkness. A moment more, and Philip again clasped his hand, and whispered:

"If the worst comes to the worst, we still are safe, so fear not."

A cold breath swept across their faces, and with a crash as of a falling monarch of the forest, the storm broke. The wind swept and eddied about them, and tugged and pulled as if to draw them into its cyclonic embrace. The floor rocked beneath their feet, and it seemed the hurricane would sweep every stone of the chateau from its foundation, as it hurtled around them in ever increasing violence. But braced against each other firmly they bade defiance to the influence, and while it raged about them, still they stood their ground unmolested and unhurt. Then from out the fury of the gale Lal Dhur's voice rang clear and loud:

"Cursed be all the Balzac race, the tree, the plant and the sprig. Cursed be Minotti, cursed be all."

And wild laughter, as from a hundred throats, echoed and re-echoed through the room. Over and around and about them it pealed, harsh and discordant, above the rush of the tempest, above the howling of the wind. A cold hand descended upon Adrian's head, and the voice said:

"As I am doomed to wander here, Nirvana ever distant, so shalt thou. Pursue thy research. It shall lead thee not to Eve, but me."

"And who art thou?" boldly answered Adrian.

"I am he from whom the first of Earthly evils

sprang—who robs mankind of reason, strength and will—who brings foul disease, and festering pestilence, and wild desire, and devouring passion to your storm tossed, discontented race. In this round of life I hold command over the human body. To you and yours I am known as Lal Dhur. To the world of shades for centuries I have been known as Cain, the Earth-Born.”

“And yet there is one still higher than thou,” bravely interposed Philip, with a covert sneer, “and in thy dark world, too.”

“Eblis battles with the freed spirits, I with humanity,” proudly replied the voice, and the storm died away and sank into the depths below as he spoke. “So long as flesh and blood and bone encircle the spirit, they are mine to contend with. The spirit which sheds these Earthly trappings and would soar to heights beyond, answers to Eblis, not to me. I pave the way which leads to him.”

“Thou wilt pave no way for us, false shade! Begone!” cried Philip, proudly.

“Fret not, Philip, thou re-incarnation of a lost leader. Thou art here on trial, and may fail again ere thy spirit ranges through the realms of space, its past sins expiated and its future gained. Six existences hast thou had in this Earth wave, twice hast thou failed, and been cast backward into humanity in homelier shape to solve thy spirit’s problem. This is the last trial gained from Devachan for centuries to come, and thou may fail. Remember this, and be not proud. Thou art not infallible, and like Minotti, may fall in the attempt to work thy freedom.”

“What hast thou and thine to do with Minotti?” replied Philip.

"Would'st thou see him now?" queried the voice, exultantly.

"If thou can show him to us, yes. We hold his Earthly body. Where is his spirit?" replied Philip.

"Draw the silken cord, and see," and Adrian felt the tassel in his hand, as the voice ceased.

"Shall I draw?" he whispered to Philip.

"Aye, draw," was the reply. "We are safe, whatever comes."

Adrian drew the silken cord and the curtains rolled away. A desolate, mountainous country appeared to view. There was no sign of vegetation anywhere. Nothing save rocks, and lava, and jets of smoke and flame appearing here and there, spurting from the parched crevices.

While they looked, a figure appeared, groping its solitary way among the heated rocks and smoke. Slowly it toiled up the steep mountain side, and stopped to rest beside a huge, misshapen stone. The figure slowly turned toward them, and they recognized Minotti, but the face was pallid, the form bent, and despondency was depicted in every curve and feature—despondency so deep that it seemed death itself were preferable by far to the solitary, lonely wretchedness that looked out of his pathetic eyes, and spoke so plainly in his sad countenance.

"See where his spirit roams, doomed by Eblis to the middle ground. Minotti would have soared to higher altitudes, and kept pace with those brave souls which lift the veil of secrecy from nature's laws, and bid defiance to the rules which common men lay down to govern common clay. He fails, as Lal Dhur failed, as many humans fail, and now he, who would fain reach higher than the highest, finds

himself a solitary mind in a world of solitude, the Land of Flame, where baser elements of nature hold control. Where earthquakes shatter and volcanoes rend the weary and tumultuous rocks for ages, till such time as higher elements gain control and fit this chaos for a future race." It was the veiled image which spoke.

"And where is this Land of Flame, O Tuaa?" cried Adrian. "Can we not seek him there?"

"The Land of Flame is Mars, the planet circling next outside the orbit of our Earth. This is but the middle ground for minds which penetrate the deeps of space and reach the distant spheres. They cannot linger here. Those who have not power to venture farther, soon return to Devachan, and wait a future age to re-appear, unless by chance they meet a stronger mind returning to this Earth, and they may follow back at once. For those who reach but Mars can ne'er return save but by help or Devachan."

"How came he there, when but an hour ago he stood with us?" queried Adrian.

"He took from Eve the drop which sent his spirit on its way. That final drop of knowledge which sets the spirit free from cloying matter, and sends it forth untrammelled in the great, wide Universe beyond. Had he but been prepared, it would have led him swiftly to her side, where loyal love would lead him. But he fell short, and could not reach her. His love o'erreached his knowledge as before."

"Then he has visited the Land of Flame at other times than this?" wonderingly questioned Adrian.

"Three times has Minotti's spirit ventured here, and then returned to Earth through stronger minds," replied the image.

"And whose power then returned him?" questioned Adrian.

"She returned with him, Eve. He could not reach her side, and so she came to his, and led his spirit back to duties here yet unfulfilled."

"Then she may help him now," exclaimed Adrian, in tones of relief.

"She may, and will, if he is not called to Devachan before she reaches him."

"And what can we do, then?" exclaimed Adrian sadly.

"Naught but hope. Were you better versed in knowledge, you might save him. Now you could but reach his side, and share his misery. Care for his body, keep it from harm, and soon he may return to claim it. If not, then rest content, for nature's laws have been obeyed, and he has sunk to rest in Devachan."

"Tell us, O! Tuaa, will he not return? Thy power should tell us, if thou wilt," pleaded Adrian earnestly, forgetful of all else in his desire to be assured of Minotti's return to Earth.

"The laws which govern prophecy in Tuaa are governed by the laws which hold supremacy o'er those who awake the dormant spirit within me. Were thou infallible, then so would I be. Clearer insight, gained by clairvoyance, opens the door of futurity to me with certainty, but only when the ennobled spirit commands supreme o'er all warring powers.

"Learn to master thyself in all things, and thou may fully master the power of prophecy within me. But as mortal man errs in prophecy for lack of knowledge, so may Tuaa, when questioned by

those who understand not the laws of nature to their core."

"Then you cannot tell us whether he returns or stays, O! Tuaa?" questioned Adrian.

"I can tell you that the law of love, both human and spiritual, would lead him back to Earth, and he will come if love can help him.

"Man plants the seed and prophesies that he will reap the harvest in the future, if nature's laws are not molested. The drouth may kill, the worm destroy, the sun dry up the plant, ere harvest time arrives, and nature's first law could be fulfilled. So is it with the subtler laws which I perceive. They may be swerved by opposing forces.

"Not a thought of man, or wish, or memory, or dream, but owes its origin to subtle laws, too intricate for ordinary minds to penetrate. They are known to the spirit within me.

"What law governs the passions of man, stirs his spirit to hate, or bends it to a dream of love? What law gives one human a grand mind, and another insanity? What law makes one religious and another disbelieving, one kind, another cruel? There are laws for all, for the life giving principle itself, and all these laws can be swerved by other laws, in time, and brought to naught. The hating man may love that which he hated, the loving hate that which he loved. The sane mind may become insane, the feeble mind gain sanity. The religious may turn to disbelief, the disbelieving to religion. The kind may be cruel, the cruel kind. Thus is the mortal swayed by different laws in this changing mortal world.

"I can but say that Minotti will return if forces at work can help him. I see those forces, and more I

cannot tell until such time as questioned by a mind whose scope embraces greater limits than thine."

The voice ceased, the tassel dropped from Adrian's hand, the curtains rolled over the scene, and once more they were in total darkness, with nothing but the faint incense arising from the censer to remind them that they stood in the curtained chamber.

As they stood, over them slowly crept an indefinable dread of something unhallowed and intangible, but fearfully present. What it was they could not fathom, but it oppressed them like an incubus, until, fight against it as they would, it seemed that it must overpower them in the end, and draw the very life essence from their beating, throbbing brains.

In the black darkness of that awful chamber, while round them reigned the silence of the tomb, each struggled bravely with the overpowering feeling and bent their wills to conquer it with all the will power at command. They felt it would not do to fail then, and yet it seemed the influence would surely overpower them.

Like the drowning wretch who feels his head swim, and his lungs fill with the cruel water, that soon shall be his winding sheet, and yet is unable to help himself.

Like the dreamer, whose restful slumber is changed to horror by the nameless terror of the enthralling nightmare, who would cry out but cannot.

Like the charmed man, who in dumb agony, step by step advances towards the fascinating eyes of the mesmeric, poisonous serpent, and knows his doom is sealed, yet cannot resist—so stood the two, while round and about them gathered the horrible shadows of soul terrifying power.

And now, from out the black shadow it seemed that forms slowly appeared to view, forms without symmetry, and misshapen, devilish in their malignity, unholy, and not of man, but of remnants, patched from the castaways of the Universe. Some were without bodies, some without limbs; all were horrible to gaze upon. Here a headless trunk trundled awkwardly about, there an armless hand waved menacingly toward them, and again there glared the hideous features of some Hell-born monstrosity of evil.

Round and round they circled, in a never ending train of horrors, gradually closing nearer and nearer to the two friends, as fresh additions joined the circling throng. It seemed that human brain could stand no more when Philip bravely cried:

"Back to your haunts, foul relics of the lower side of nature! Back! You cannot harm us, even here!"

But the eddying throng swept on as before. Round and round they went, and round and round the two friends turned to watch them, horribly fascinated. Suddenly the throng stopped, and Lal Dhur's voice rang loud and clear again:

"Sons of men, what think you of the nameless entities, the Terrene throng, born like yourselves, of woman? Know that the passions of man, since first deception brought evil Cain into the world, have fathered these with regularity. Aye, man, of whom you boast that he is made in God's own image, man the intelligent, man the great, has brought forth these. Higher than the highest of his kind, yet lower than the lowest of his animal race, is the animal man.

"He who would cross the threshold of the Uni-

verse, must battle first with these, who cling unrepentant to that world which brought them forth. Think not to escape them. The shadow of the Earth-Born falls upon you as I speak. Look! Behold!

With staring eyes they gazed, while the shadows seemed to deepen around them and the air became more oppressive. Slowly, but surely, a faint outline began to define itself against the black darkness of that awful chamber, while the Terrene circle closed around them. Gradually the luminous, shadowy outline assumed proportions distinct and terrible, and towering above them in the darkness they saw a new and strangely awful figure, lacking the proportions of man or beast. With neither symmetrical head or body, it appeared to move like the wavering flame in the whirling windstorm, or as the sands of the desert in the terrible cyclone. It was made up of luminous particles, each whirling round and round with inconceivable rapidity, and as they gazed upward they could see far above them that the figure grew manlike toward the top, and out of its misshapen trunk, two wavering offshoots slowly formed and stretched forth far and wide as though to claim the world.

Like a pillar of light in the darkness, crowned with a massive head of huge proportions, stony, staring, fearfully unfathomable eyes, and sphinx-like countenance, unreadable, unknowable, dreadful to gaze upon, yet grand and awful in its every part, so before them shone this wonderful figure, and all the Earth-Born throng paled in comparison to it, and faded away like the fog before the sunlight.

As they stood trembling, unable to resist the fell in-

fluence, and gazing fascinated at the strangely awful figure, from the midst of it came these words:

"Behold Terrasal, the spirit of Earth, who rules all things terrestrial since first this world took shape. Born with it in the midst of nebulous chaos—ever present in its molten fire-fight with the elements—ruling still o'er all its materiality—I have been called from my home in the flame-lit depths of the Earth to you. Nothing mortal e'er escapes me. Over all I reign supreme.

"The kings of the Earth spring from and return to me. The cities of the world rear their proud heads toward the sky, and crumble in the dust at my feet. The races of men arise in might, and are swept away and lost in my bosom. The continents of the world and its oceans are mine to command. Three times have I deluged the Earth with its waters. For ages was it cleansed with my fires. You cannot escape me. When I want you, I will call."

The strange voice ceased, and standing there in the luminous glow, while over them bent the incarnation of Earth, they felt their remaining courage ebb slowly away.

The eddying throng reappeared, and drew nearer and nearer, and the terrible faces leered at them, the horrible hands clutched at their garments, and the skinny, repulsive arms sought to embrace them to breasts that were not visible.

"How like you my Earth-Born cohorts?" sneeringly questioned Lal Dhur.

"Each of them has power to give to humanity an impulse for evil. Not a thought of wrong in man, or an evil wish, or a dark deed, but is prompted by some Earthly entity like those around you, and

could human eyes see clearly, humanity would know why at times hellish passion, and evil impulse, and deadly sickness, sway the weak changling called man, who thinks himself a God, but who falls lower than the brute.

"In this world, called Earth, he is tossed about like an empty ball, neither knowing from whence his spirit came or whence it goes.

"When the shadows thicken about him, and he crosses to the realm of disembodied spirits, cast forth into space like the chrysalis that has gained its wings, but knows not its course or surroundings, then he becomes the prey for those evil ones who have gone before, and who grope in darkness round this miserable sphere, ever waiting, ever watching, for newly entered spirits.

"Would'st thou rise above it ere thy time and pierce the mysteries which surround you? Welcome then, welcome, but know that you remain with us, and reach no higher toward the outer spheres while we command the way."

The sneering voice died slowly as Adrian leaned heavily against his comrade for support, and would have fallen under the dread influence, had not Philip gently laid him at his feet unconscious.

"Welcome! Welcome!" cried Lal Dhur exultantly.

"Back to your shadows!" sternly cried Philip.
"We still are masters here!"

And at that moment he touched a little drop from a vial to the floor, and instantly a ring of fire surrounded the two friends. A light incense arose from the circle of flame, and hovered over the room, and as it spread the gigantic figure above them melted away, the whirling, horrible circle slowly widened,

keeping clear of the incense, until finally, one by one, they disappeared. Far away in the depths could be heard the rushing noise, as of distant water lashed by the wind, and again Lal Dhur's voice faintly reached Philip's ears :

“Once more have you escaped me, proud one, but you will yet join the Earth-Born throng.”

Then dead silence reigned, and while the incense filled the chamber, and the circle of flame still steadily burned, Philip gave one glance around, and seeing nothing but the dark curtains and the veiled figure, he gathered the unconscious Adrian in his arms, and stepping over the flame, gained the entrance, and half carrying, half supporting his friend, they finally reached the lower hall.

Then Philip laid Adrian upon a divan, and by dint of rubbing soon brought him to his senses, and together they looked at the quiet body of Minotti lying near, and shudderingly wondered whether his spirit would endow it with life again, or whether like those of the peaceful ones below, it would soar away, forgetful of its sheath, for years, perhaps forever.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WONDERFUL ESSENCE WHICH PRODUCES COMA.

Adrian slept long and heavily after the exciting experiences he had passed through in this mysterious chateau, and it was late in the following day when he stirred uneasily upon his couch and dreamily opened his eyes, gazing around as if uncertain of his whereabouts.

"Ah, I remember," he said, springing to his feet, "the visit to the tomb, the curtained chamber, and Minotti's catastrophe. But where is his body, and Philip, what has become of him?"

These thoughts flashed rapidly over his brain as he stood fully awakened, and glanced cautiously and searchingly about. What if Philip, too, were gone.

But no, at that moment Philip appeared, and a sad smile illumined his countenance as he saw Adrian's anxious look.

"Our meal is ready," he said, "and you have slept long and heavily. I trust you feel rested."

"Rested, yes. If I really can feel at rest again. But what have you done with Minotti?"

"His body lies peacefully in an adjoining room. I trust his spirit is as peaceful, but fear otherwise."

"Aye, so do I. But what more can we do?"

"Nothing, as yet, but watch and wait. But come, let us eat," and he led the way into the room where

they had eaten the previous day. Three chairs were drawn up to the table.

"He might awake and join us," said Philip, answering the questioning look of Adrian.

They sat down, and appeased the cravings of nature for food, and when they had finished the meal, Adrian kindly took the hand of Philip in his own, and said :

"Philip, we are left in this chateau alone, you and I, and fate has thrown us strangely together in a sea of mysteries. I am young and hopeful; anxious to fathom the secrets which surround us, most anxious of all to discover the means of bringing back the spirits of those whose bodies now rest solely in our mutual care. You, possessing more knowledge and experience than myself, if not my hereditary power, can best direct me how to use and cultivate this gift for our mutual benefit and that of those we both love. Will you help me, and in so doing help them?"

"With my life," warmly replied Philip, "you can count upon me always."

"Let us begin then, at once," rejoined Adrian. "You knew my mother, the Countess Lena, and my father, Count Balzac."

"I knew them both for years," replied Philip, closely watching the questioner, as though to read his thoughts.

"Then tell me, to begin with, did the Countess love the Count, and did he love her?"

Philip stirred uneasily in his chair, and returned no reply.

"Tell me the truth," queried Adrian, "if you know anything, tell me, I beseech you, for I, their child, should know the truth."

Philip turned his face away and asked sadly:

"Of what avail would this knowledge be to you? They were married and comparatively happy, as the world goes. What more is necessary that you should know?"

"Then there was a little real love between them. I felt it from the first. What was the secret of their union?"

"The Count was a scholar and a learned man in many occult things. She was the sweetest, gentlest, most impressible of womankind. He required her assistance in many ways. She was always kindly treated, with unvarying courtesy and watchful care, but the Count had no heart for any woman. He was bound up in his studies and his work, like all his student ancestors."

"Then you think he married her in order that she might assist him in his researches."

"That I believe to be the case. I know that he exercised unbounded influence over her at all times, and that he sent her spirit forth at will."

"Then others loved her, but not the Count."

"I did not say so."

"But I know it. How came he to marry her? Where did he meet her?"

"She met him in St. Petersburg, at the home of her relative, Countess Helen Petrovisky, her mother's sister. Her father, Count de Courcey, was French, but her mother belonged to a noble Russian family of fortune and rank, the House of Rostopchin. Both her parents died in the bloom of youth, leaving the infant Lena to the care of her relative. When your father met her she was scarce eighteen, and she married him ere she was twenty. By so doing she

incurred the wrath of her kindred, and she has never been forgiven.

"Her fortune was princely, and they designed her for a more powerful mate than a student Count, placed her in a convent at Kiev, and supposed her safe from all suitors, for she had many. She escaped, some say by feigning death, while the sisters of the convent still assert that she left her cell a corpse, but was revived by Count Balzac's power.

"Be that as it may, he met the funeral cortege at the convent gates, was granted the privilege of one last look upon the dead, and as he spoke his sorrowing words over her, she arose from the coffin, the affrighted nuns fled, and ere their courage returned, Lena Courcey had been placed in Count Balzac's carriage, and was driven rapidly away. Before the news of this strange proceeding reached the ears of her relatives, she was irrevocably married to the Count, and they were on their way to France as man and wife. This is the story as I learned it."

"Minotti vaguely spoke of enemies to our house, still powerful, who had robbed me of name and fortune. What of them?"

"Minotti spoke the truth, and were he here could tell you more than I, since what I know is gained from him. I had seldom seen Count Balzac for some years previous to his last experiment, though once we studied occultism together, and were fast friends in that secret path of learning.

"He was attracted by the blacker arts of sorcery, and we gradually drifted apart in our studies and our lives, for sooner or later, he who calls upon these Earth-Born powers, will be overwhelmed by them if it is continued in. True adepts call on them

only when all else fails, and they can safely control the power they invoke.

"I think the enemies he gathered about him were brought principally by those like Lal Dhur, learned occultists, who practiced but the darkest arts for selfish ends. Through one of these associates, principally, he was induced to transfer his property and his wife's to that man, with the exception of this old chateau and some few thousands of a vast estate. I know but little of it, only what Minotti says, and he could never prove before any court what had been told him. Some day it may be solved, but knowledge alone will do it."

"But Minotti spoke of a band, a secret one, linked together for plunder, though professing a grand creed, and through whose influence the Count was worked upon to a great extent, and that through this association his misfortunes occurred. Where is this band? Who are its members?"

Philip's face darkened visibly as Adrian spoke, and leaning closely toward him, he said impressively:

"Minotti was right, but of that band or rather order, I cannot tell you fully now. Suffice it to say that it is so secret that many of its most dangerous tools are ignorant that they are counted as its members, and would swear truthfully that they knew nothing of it. Its initiates are scattered over the world. Its emissaries may be found among all classes—the high, the low, the rich, the poor. It is ancient in its origin, and originally used only for good ends, but for years it has fallen, and it is now generally controlled by the worst elements. It is relentless in its pursuit and terrible in its power for evil.

The Thugs and Assassins of India were at one time controlled by leaders in it. Lal Dhur was a controlling member of it. The present leader of it in this country is the one who received your lost fortune, so Minotti informed me years ago, and his career is so black that no Earthly power can save him. I have heard little of him for some time, however, and hope that he is satisfied with the injury done to you."

"But who is this man, and what is the order called? How may I know them?" excitedly asked Adrian.

"His name I dare not tell you now, and, till later, let them rest. The members may be called counts, countesses, gentlemen, ladies, peasants, canaille, as you find them, but in whatever station found, they are just the same. There is but one infallible test to discover their identity, and that I cannot now disclose to you. For the present let them be forgotten, and hope they are content with the ruin already wrought to you and yours."

"And shall I not be revenged upon them? Shall I let my name and fortune go?" excitedly cried Adrian.

"If you care to enter a struggle now, in your youth, which if you live will follow you into old age. If you wish to throw your chances of discovering the whereabouts of the Countess, of the Count and Minotti to the winds. If you are prepared to give up all hope of knowledge beyond this sphere, in order to spend a lifetime battling with some of the most evil elements in it, then seek to overthrow those who wreck the strongest when they choose.

"For your own sake, for the sake of those you

hold most dear, I would advise you to first perfect yourself in knowledge, and then, when you fully understand the undertaking, if you desire to war with that band, do so, but not now. They would overthrow you with a single move, and you would lose all, gain nothing."

"I understand, and at another, later day, will ask for your advice. For the present, give me more knowledge that I may explore the hidden paths which lead to that which seems now unattainable to mortals, the path which brings me to that great, unknown beyond, where all seems dark, mysterious and silent to humanity. Give me but the secret which will lead me safely there, and allow me to return, and that is all I ask at present. Let the Earth be forgotten. I would rise above it and beyond it."

"Well said, Adrian, Count Balzac. Let that band be forgotten then till such time as you can meet them without fear. Meantime, we will perfect ourselves in knowledge which will protect you, if used aright, against them, for in knowledge alone is safety."

"What then shall be our next step, Philip? You are better versed than I in these mysterious arts. Where shall we find what we seek?"

"We can find the knowledge desired in the private library of this chateau. First, we must safely dispose of this semblance to Minotti, which lies so calmly here beside us, and then we will to work."

"What shall be done with the body?" questioned Adrian, glancing at it half in doubt, half in anxiety.

"I would suggest that we place it upon a couch in the apartment that we will occupy here, so that it will be ever near us in case the spirit should return, or that we take it to the tomb below, if you desire,

and rest it side by side with those who are likewise silent as himself."

"As you please, but do you think we should venture to the tomb with him. Had we not better place the body in some safe spot for the present, and leave its further disposal in the tomb until the influence below is less to be dreaded than now?"

"I agree with you fully, and we will lay the body in our private chamber till such time as it shall be safe to take it to the sepulchre below. Let us then select an apartment for our private use at once, and take it there. Follow me, Adrian, and make your selection from the rooms of this chateau, which for years have been unused."

Philip arose as he spoke, and led the way toward the end of the great hall where they had slumbered during the preceding night. On he went, Adrian closely following. They passed to the left of the grand staircase and soon reached a door at the end of the hall. It was securely locked, and ere Philip opened it, with a key drawn from a little vase which stood near, he said :

"This was the private library of the Count, and of his ancestors. Here they read and pondered over volumes of that knowledge we desire to master. It is here we must find the final step. The private chamber adjoining was the sleeping apartment of the Count, and it is there I believe we had better place the body of Minotti, and there that we ourselves should sleep. These rooms are removed from the main part of the chateau, and for that reason I think they are the safest and best for our purpose."

As he finished speaking Philip turned the bolt, and they entered a medium sized room, through the cur-

tained windows of which a few rays of light shed their soft glow upon a noble array of books, charts, and curious looking instruments.

Philip raised the curtains, and they gazed around them in the full light of day. Suddenly Adrian uttered a startled exclamation, and pointed to a portrait set into the wall, and hanging over the mantle-piece above an ancient fireplace.

"What is that, Philip?" he cried, and as they both looked, the lips of the portrait appeared to weave into a faint, shadowy smile, and the eyes flashed with almost speaking intelligence.

"The duplicate of the portrait in the residence on the Rue St. Honore," cried Adrian, excitedly. "See how it smiles as we look. It is the same—the haughty features, the dark, piercing eyes, and the striking countenance."

Was it also a guard over a secret recess? And as the thought sprang into Adrian's mind the portrait slowly swung outward, and disclosed a hidden receptacle, similar to that shown when its counterpart was seen in the house on the Rue St. Honore.

"I feel that he will help us," exclaimed Adrian, and the lips of the portrait seemed to smile in acquiescence. "Do you know whose face that is, Philip?" he anxiously questioned.

"I know not," replied Philip. "I only know that it has been in the family for years, and is the portrait of some magian or sorcerer of ancient Egypt, and wherever its counterpart is found there is mystery connected with it. I am told there were but seven like it in the world. But see, within the recess a shadowy hand beckons to you and points to the roll below."

Ere he ceased speaking, Adrian bounded forward, and grasped the roll. The hand faded away, the portrait swung back to its place with an easy grace, and Adrian stood before Philip with the roll in his possession, and a joyous expression upon his countenance.

"A good beginning for the day, Philip. Now to the private chamber, then let us dispose of the body, and next to work. We shall succeed. I feel it! I know it!" and his eyes again lighted with that flame of enthusiasm which bespoke his earnestness.

Philip caught the inspiration, and pressed his friend's hand warmly, while his eyes answered the flash from Adrian's. Then he opened a side door and disclosed a larger room, saying :

"This is our apartment. How do you like it?"

Adrian stepped into the chamber, but it was so dark that he could not distinguish much of the surroundings, until Philip rolled the heavy curtains away from the windows. Then he saw that the room was handsomely furnished, with antique, but elegant furniture, heavy and impressive. Over the bed there hung a satin canopy, from which depended velours curtains, rich and tasteful. The chairs were large and easy, while two divans invited the weary to rest. The walls were richly decorated in red and gold, dark and elegant. But the most attractive objects to Adrian were two portraits hanging side by side upon the wall. One was of the Count, his father. One of the Countess, his mother. Gazing at them earnestly, he said :

"This is our abiding place. Here we will work out the mystery of man. With these faces before me to inspire, we shall succeed."

"Well said, Adrian. Now let us bring Minotti here, and the earlier we begin our researches, the sooner we will end in knowledge."

Together they left the chamber, and soon returned, bearing between them the inert form of Minotti, which they carefully laid upon one of the divans, and sadly looking down upon it, both inwardly vowed that sooner or later they would fathom the mystery surrounding that quiet form, and those other lifeless ones below.

"Now to work," cried Adrian, as they entered the library. And he looked exultantly over the long array of volumes spread out in tier upon tier before his eyes. And then he gazed once more at the portrait over the mantelpiece, and again it seemed to smile at him with speaking intelligence in its glance. He picked up the roll he had taken from the recess, and saw the Chaldean inscription upon the outside, which, translated, read :

"He who would pierce the hidden laws of Nature must first know himself in all his intricate entirety. That man who knows himself, his power, his purpose, his four-fold nature and his highest impulse, can mount the ladder made for him alone, and breathe the free air of a limitless creation. Let none essay to mount that ladder ere they know themselves full well, or Nature, whom they thus defy, will turn their knowledge to disaster."

This was written upon the outside leaf in a clear hand, for the roll was of the ancient style of Egyptian pen printed papyrus, before the era of type and press had rendered printing easy. At the bottom of the inscription was signed :

"JANNES, CHALDEAN."

Only these words, and evidently the author's name and country.

Adrian turned the papyrus leaves until he reached the following, which attracted his attention, and which translated, ran :

“The spirit, or the mind—that guiding power which holds in abeyance the life principle, and the body it inhabits—and the soul—that nebulous covering which surrounds the spirit—are bound by loose fetters to the body which are easily broken. As the human body lays aside its dress, or changes it at caprice, when no longer desirable, so the mind can lay aside its dress, the body, and change its covering if it desires, without awaiting the actual death of the body, which frees the spirit forever from that habitation.

“This result can be obtained by using every endeavor to render the mind superior to the body in all things, as the power to free the mind comes only through long and continued subjection of the body, until the latter reaches the desired state when the spirit can be freed from it without injury to the spirit, soul, life principle or body.

“To accomplish this result, subject the body to frequent fasts, place vegetable food only within it, give up the pursuits of the flesh, and embrace the higher desires of the mental nature, to the exclusion of the material. That man who devotes his life to enriching his external surroundings, who thinks more of his body than his mind, seldom gives that mind an opportunity to escape ere complete death of the body sets it free.

“The mind cannot serve two masters. Either it becomes the slave of Earthly desires, pertaining to that body it inhabits ; or it springs into higher fields, and serves alone that source from which it sprang.

“All minds are free at intervals, when death of the body releases them, until such time as they are called again to supply some body with its mental

capacity, and enter once more the struggle for perfection.

"The mind, being ethereal, invisible, and not in any sense belonging to Earth, is affected by Earthly agents only so far as they affect the body that mind inhabits. Therefore, to control the mind, do not introduce common Earthly agencies, but the higher ones of thought, reflection and learning. These give the mind practice, until at last, the body being in proper condition, the will of the individual prevails, and the spirit leaves its temporary habitation and returns to it as desired.

"While Earthly agents, such as fasting and vegetable food, do not affect the mind itself, they can so powerfully act upon the body that by their use the spirit is assisted to freedom, because they place its home in such a state that this liberty can be taken without injury to any portion of the individual.

"Drugs can debase the body, stupefy the life principle within it, and to all appearances kill the mind at times. But this latter effect is produced because the drug has so affected the body that it is not a proper habitation for the mind, and so the mind leaves it by degrees as the body by degrees becomes unfit, until finally it is vanished, and the body is without a mind, simply being endowed with the soul and life principle. In this case the person is partially or wholly insane, and the mind can only return as the body becomes fit to receive it. These drugs are to be shunned.

"There is one natural essence which can stupefy the life principle, and leave it in such a condition that it awakes to the touch of the master mind at will. Under the use of this powerful essence the body becomes dormant, needs no nourishment, and will lie for years in perfect health, ready at any time the returning mind may desire, to again waken to life. It is a liquid so volatile that it is but rarely secured, even when found, as it vanishes into air readily when exposed. It exists in some animals and reptiles at certain times, and when found at all, is

discovered in a small sac, attached to the brain. In such animals, at given periods, this sac opens and emits a drop of the fluid, which so soon as it touches the nerve centre, stops all action, renders the life principle dormant, and the animal loses all vitality until such time as it is again desirable to become an animate object.

"A drop of this fluid, or even the inhalation of it, will render the life principle dormant in man, and permit the mind to leave the body with perfect safety to both.

"Only at certain periods does this fluid exist in the animal, or reptile, and the greatest care is necessary to find and preserve it. The crocodile of the Nile produces it. The hooded serpent of the jungles of Asia and Africa at times possess it. The lowly frog of the marsh generates it. It must be detached from the quivering sac ere the brain ceases to act, for with the cessation of the action, the sac opens, and the fluid escapes.

"Searcher after the hidden laws of nature, know that this is one of the initial steps."

Adrian closed the roll, and once more glanced at the dark features of the portrait over the mantel. Again the lips appeared to smile with a triumphant expression. Turning to Philip, Adrian said :

"Let me see the vinaigrette you took from Minotti's hand in the tomb below."

Philip handed it to him, and Adrian slowly raised it, and carefully examined its contents. There was little in it, but a few drops of the golden hued liquid still remained, brilliant and scintillating.

"This is that wonderful essence which controls the life giving principle. When shall we partake of it?"

"When we have followed the directions given, and feel that we shall meet with success."

"You are right, Philip, and now to work—to study—to win!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE LAST DAY ON EARTH.

Six months have come and gone since the three friends met at the Chateau Balzac. Months of deep study and of research for two of them—months of silence for the other. Adrian had often in that period felt an intangible presence near him, and imagined that he could feel the soft gaze of tender eyes bent over his work and himself. He repeatedly mentioned this to Philip, who, like the questioner, thought it was the beautiful Countess watching over them.

Minotti's spirit had not returned to his body in these days and weeks past. While they had carefully watched for any sign of reviving animation, they were not rewarded. His body lay as silent and inert as on the first day, and they had well nigh given up hope of seeing him in life again.

After their previous experiences they had avoided both the curtained chamber and the tomb, but Adrian had learned from Philip that the latter connected with the catacombs of Paris, and that the horrible circle of shadows they had seen, were in all probability remnants of the souls of those bodies which had been removed from the Cemetery of the Innocents, and other burial grounds, and were placed in the dark galleries of the catacombs, where room was not an object, and the bones would rest in equal safety as in the overcrowded cemeteries.

He likewise learned that the pyramid of the tomb

had been constructed of stone quarried from the catacombs, as had much of Paris, and that it was built by workmen who had not been permitted to ascend to the chateau, but entered the catacombs in the city of Paris. In being led through the dark galleries, they could not tell at what point the pyramid was built, whether in Paris, St. Cloud, Versailles, or elsewhere.

This was important, as it was necessary for the Count's plan that the secrecy of his tomb should be inviolate, and further that it should be free from the thieves who infested the catacombs. So the entrance was walled up between the tomb and the catacombs, when the pyramid was finished, but it could be easily re-opened in case of necessity for removal or flight.

Adrian learned many things during these months, and Philip and himself followed the instructions laid out for students of occult knowledge, in both the Black branch and the White. Finally, feeling that they were prepared, Adrian said :

"Philip, I think the time has arrived, and I am ready for the final step."

"Then we will take it together," answered Philip, "but first we must prepare this chateau against intrusion in our absence."

"True, and our bodies must be placed in the most secret spot. But what is the latest report regarding Minotti's disappearance?"

"It has ceased to agitate the people of his parish, and his successor fills his place with satisfactory results. They cling to the theory of murder and abduction, however, when it is spoken of at intervals. But weightier things occupy the public and the papers now than the strange disappearance of any

priest. Riots for bread fill turbulent Paris with fear, and the days look dark for France."

"Then we are completely forgotten, and it is well, for I had few acquaintances who cared enough to enquire, and Minotti's many friends have given him up for lost."

Adrian advanced to Minotti's silent body as he spoke, and requested Philip to try once again with him, as they had frequently done, their combined power over him, and see if they could not bring his wandering spirit back. Following the mystic rules they had learned in the book of Jannes, they each grasped one of his hands, placed their free hands upon his head, and uttering a prayer from the Kabala, they willed in one mighty effort for him to arise.

As they willed and spoke, Minotti arose from the couch, shaded his eyes with his hands, and stood there like a statue of the dead, peering doubtfully about him.

Philip and Adrian both sprang joyously toward him, and threw their arms about him in rapture at his return.

"You called me, and I am here, but we are in the Count's library, and I thought we were all in the sepulchre below. Yet it seems somewhat indistinct. What has happened? How came we here?"

And then the circumstances of his sudden cataleptic state were described, together with all subsequent events, and Minotti listened with deep interest to the recital. At the end, he sighed deeply, and sadly said:

"Then it is true as I had dreamed and thought, that I will never be fitted to carry out the experi-

ments that my heart desires most. I will always be of the Earth, Earthly, and unable to rise above it."

"Wait, and be patient," exclaimed a strange voice, as if coming from the lips of the panelled portrait.

The friends looked at each other in wondering silence, and Minotti shivered slightly as he replied:

"Who speaks?"

But no answer came, and after a few moments of waiting, Adrian broke the silence by saying:

"Have you no recollection of the occurrences in your trance state, Minotti?"

"None. It is an absolute blank to me."

"How then can those who make the trial keep an Earthly record of their adventures while in the spirit?" queried Adrian.

"Through the veiled image," answered the strange voice, as if again coming from the lips of the portrait.

"But Tuua will not answer to but few," replied Adrian.

"The image will answer if you return to it either in the flesh or in the spirit," replied the voice.

"But I may not be able to come back. I may not wish to leave a distant world and return to this. What then?" questioned Adrian.

"You will be able to come back," said the voice.

"And if I do not wish to lose the time?" again questioned Adrian.

"Time is made for humanity by mortals. There is no time for the freed spirit. As the spark of electricity circles the world in a second, so does the freed spirit circle the Universe at will in an instant," replied the voice.

"And who are you who tells me this?"

"I am one forgotten ages ago. Question me no more about myself. Some day you will know."

"And who shall try the experiment? I, alone, or all of us?" queried Adrian.

"Philip and yourself. Let Minotti remain and keep his trust," replied the voice.

"When shall we make the test?" said Adrian.

"This night, when the portrait smiles upon you. Not before. Farewell! till we meet again," and the voice ceased.

"One word more," cried Adrian. "Know you aught of her?"

But silence reigned, and no word broke its stillness. All sat quietly for several moments hoping the voice would again reply, but it did not, and finally Minotti said:

"This night, then, we part. Let us arrange our affairs quickly and well. I will remain behind and guard all the bodies. Only promise me that you will, one of you, return within a fortnight, and give me news through Tuua of your success and adventures."

"One of us will return," said Adrian.

"And within the time named," said Philip.

"Then I will visit the curtained chamber at noon every day," replied Minotti. "And now to prepare for the trial. Where will you make it?"

"Here in this room," replied Adrian.

"Yes, I think it is best to make it here," joined in Philip, "but how shall we dispose of our bodies?"

"I will place them in the adjoining apartment, side by side, and will myself occupy this room to be near them," replied Minotti. "They will be well cared for, I promise you."

"And I will bring Karnac to assist in the watch," cried Adrian. And he willed the python to appear. Ere long they heard him swiftly coming through the hallway, and he soon entered the apartment, his eyes blinking brightly, and his head proudly erect. He went straight to Adrian.

"Karnac will be an able assistant," said Minotti, and the python laid his head against Adrian's hand as if to emphasize the statement by this sign of allegiance.

"And now, regarding our bodies, Minotti, all being arranged, what shall we say for our spirits. Suppose we could not after all, come back, what would you do?" queried Adrian.

"The voice said you could return," replied Minotti, "and that voice seldom errs."

"What, you know it then?" asked Adrian in surprise.

"I feel that it speaks the truth," replied Minotti, "and beyond that I know nothing."

"Whose do you think it is?" asked Philip.

"I do not know, but I judge the voice is that of the original of the portrait," was Minotti's reply. "It is perhaps Jannes, as both the cabinet here and in the Rue St. Honore contained papyrus writings signed with that name."

"But not that Jannes who stood before Pharaoh, and combined with Jambres, opposed his magic against Moses in his efforts to free the children of Israel," said Philip, "for this is a Chaldean, while that Jannes was Egyptian."

"It may be one and the same," said Minotti, "and if it is, Adrian's power, combined with your own, can, now that you are prepared, perhaps bring their

souls before you through the Black Incantation you will find in this book," and Minotti handed them a volume from the library entitled, "Magic, and the Great Magicians of the Ancient World," by Zoroaster. Looking at it, they recognized it as one they had seen before in their studies. They memorized the incantation, and Minotti made them promise that if they tried it and succeeded in obtaining anything they would inform him. Adrian then said:

"Remember, Minotti, if you hear nothing from us at the end of a fortnight, do not give up hope, but wait, knowing that we will return as quickly as possible."

"I will remember," answered Minotti, "but as the day is now far advanced, judging by the sunlight, had we not better take a last walk together around the grounds before you bid farewell?"

"You are right," said Philip. "I wish to once more walk in the sunlight of this Earth, ere we test the lights and shadows of another, and perhaps a darker existence. Who knows what we may meet at the very beginning of the experiment."

"But wait—suppose the experiment, after all, should not be necessary. We have recalled Minotti, why not the others," said Adrian.

"To the tomb, at once!" cried Philip, and Minotti seconded him with enthusiasm.

So to the panel they went, ignited the lamp, brought forth the censer, lit the incense, and were soon winding down the secret stairway, when Minotti turned back and said he would await them above, as he thought they had better go without him. For a moment they hesitated, and then acquiesced, and he returned, while they sped onward.

The tomb was gained, the sarcophagus lay before them, and within it reposed the two silent ones, covered with the veiling.

Softly and reverently they advanced, while the features of Sesostris looked mystically upon them from above, and the golden figures of Ra and of Isis shone from the dark curtains as before.

There was no change, and as they gazed upon the surroundings, each felt that they were far better able to cope with any evil shades than they had been on their previous visit. No fear entered their hearts. Claspings hands, they gently raised the veiling, and before them lay the beautiful sleepers. Then, gently raising the hands of the Countess, they each took one, and placing their free hands upon her forehead, willed as before over the priest, with earnest strength, for her spirit to return. But no answering movement greeted their effort, although both had been repeating the same prayer used over Minotti.

It was a failure, and gently laying the beautiful figure down, they resolved to try with the Count. The same process was tried with him, and with like result. No feature moved, and the sleepers slept on as before.

"Let us try the art of the Black Incantation," whispered Philip to his companion. "The secret may thus possibly be unlocked, and it is said that one will always appear to those who try it without fear, and bring their wills to bear strongly."

"We will try it," returned Adrian, in a whisper.

Joining their four hands over the sarcophagus, they bent their wills together as before, and slowly chanted:

"Thou, who stood before Sesostris,*
And with Moses measured genius.
Thou, who stayed the hand of Pharaoh
 When he would have set them free.
Listen, Listen, to our calling,
Gently, Gently, o'er us falling,
Send thy spirit and encompass
 Those who dare to call on thee.
Jannes ! Jambres ! Mortals here
Thus adjure you. Rise ! Appear !"

The incense arising from the censer slowly but surely wafted its faint perfume over and around them. The golden figures of Ra and of Isis glimmered mystically in the half light. The ivory face of Sesostris above them gleamed cold and clear. Gradually the lamp-light faded, faded. Fainter and fainter it grew, and now from out the shadows they could distinguish two luminous figures of ancient and majestic mien. Dark were their faces, and bound about either wrist was the sacred serpent. High and commanding was their presence. Strange and unfamiliar their appearance. Yet one resembled the dark portrait over the secret receptacle, but his face was as adamant, and his lips no longer smiled in triumph as he spoke :

"Jannes and Jambres, highest of Chaldean priests, who defied the powers of the Hebrew before the presence of the great Pharaoh, are here. What would you ?"

"The return of these two wandering spirits," courageously answered Philip.

"Boldly have you called us. Bravely have you

*The quotation is given as it appears in the roll, although many historians claim that it was the successor of Sesostris, Mineptah II., that Moses stood before, and made his demands of.—*Editor.*

spoken. Yet the Uana, the Remu, the Uthun, and Terrasal control them. Nor can we set them free."

"But shall we find them in our searching?" eagerly and fearlessly questioned Adrian.

"Sooner or later you will see them. May Osiris, and Isis, and Horus assist you. Farewell!"

And the two figures faded away, and the misty incense spread again over the scene. The light of the lamp grew brighter, and in that quiet, rock-encompassed chamber, dedicated to the living dead, they breathed free and exultant, for they knew that at last their research had succeeded, and they were masters of themselves—that never again would the evil Earth-Born souls be able to prevail against them.

They had fortified themselves with knowledge, which, if used aright, could always protect them. Only by their free will could they now be prevailed upon, and though they had failed in the principle test, still they had succeeded in that one which proved them ready to take the final step. They had used both the White and the Black, and had emerged without fear or harm from the latter. They had proven successful in Minotti's case with the former.

So, after one last, lingering look at the quiet inmates of the sarcophagus, they placed the veiling again about the silent figures. With fleet steps they gained the stairway, and were soon at Minotti's side, whom they found enjoying a meal after his long fast.

"Come out into the sunshine," said Adrian, after telling him their experience, "and let us take a last look ere we bid farewell to the chateau and its mysteries."

So out into the sunshine they went, followed by the faithful Karnac.

It was a beautiful day, and the summer sun shone bright and clear through a cloudless sky. The old chateau and its neglected grounds looked as ancient and uninviting to Adrian as when he first saw them in the early morning light, but now that he realized how much this grand, though decaying, chateau guarded, both it and the grounds were endeared to him by every sentiment of filial love and awakening power in his nature.

He felt ten years older than when he had first gazed upon these grounds only a few short months ago. Then he was a youth, just entering upon the threshold of vigorous manhood—now he felt that manhood stirring within him as though born years before, instead of months. One thing he was determined upon, above everything else, that come what might, he would at any cost find the Countess, and solve the mysterious relationship which the veiled image drew between his beautiful mother and Eve.

For Lilith he cared nothing, and of her history he knew but little. Of Lal Dhur, living or dead, and Cain, he held but little fear now, out in the warm bright sunshine, and for the Count, his father, he felt some little affection and much curiosity. But for the Countess, his mother, the peerless original of that charming miniature, his heart leaped with ever increasing love and tenderness, and for her he would dare all the terrors of this Earth, and those beyond it, should such exist.

Where would he look for her? How should he guide himself to find her? Was she hovering about

this sphere, or did she linger in some other planet of this limitless Universe? Was ever an errand like this given to mortal before, to search the starry worlds for the spirit of her who gave him life on this Earth? These and other thoughts crowded themselves upon Adrian as he gazed upon the old chateau, the home of his race, and wondered where it would all end.

Philip and Minotti, too, seemed lost in thought on this eventful day, and stood silently looking about them, without speaking. Suddenly Philip's friend, the raven, with a joyful croak, flew toward him, and perched upon his shoulder, fluttering with pleasure.

"Ah, Rita, I had forgotten you," said Philip kindly, as he stroked the bird absent-mindedly. "You will care for my pets while I am away, will you not Minotti, all of them?"

"Certainly, Philip. It shall be one of my duties, and so far as Rita is concerned a pleasurable one, but I cannot say as much for some of them—this one for instance," as a handsomely mottled serpent glided toward them and rested his head upon Philip's foot. It was a fine specimen of the American rattlesnake, and its fangs were evidently not drawn.

"Yet this serpent could protect you far better than could the raven. Think what powerful friends these poisonous serpents can be if properly controlled. It is as much to their presence as anything else that the chateau enjoys the seclusion it does. Treat them well, they are your friends, but beware of them as enemies. They strike when least expected, and they strike to kill," replied Philip.

"I will care for them," replied Minotti. "Are there many?"

"Quite a number, just how many I do not know. But unless they come to you they will want nothing. So you need not mind them," replied Philip.

"See, they are coming now," said Minotti.

And through the grass on every side they could be seen, gliding among the weeds and blades, and centering about the party, as if some magic had brought them. There were serpents of many varieties but towering above them all in size and power was Karnac, as he erected his head and gazed around at their gathering numbers. On they came, forming a perfect ring about the three friends, while the quivering grass for rods away proved that the tented part had not yet arrived.

"This is your doing, Adrian," said Philip, kindly. "Every serpent on the grounds will soon be here if you keep willing it. But let them come, for I would like to see their numbers. In many years I have not seen them gather thus, but once since the Count's absence, and their numbers must have increased ten fold meantime."

On they came, piling one above the other, with bright, scintillating eyes, and weavy, slow motion of grace and power, for many of them were of the larger varieties, and in their twists and curves much latent strength was manifest. And now a sort of bulwark of serpents surrounded the friends, all gazing bright-eyed at them, as much as to say, "We are here. What do you wish of us? Speak, and we obey."

"I never appreciated my gift before," said Adrian. "I see now what a power it gives. Just think that

at my wish these serpents would spring upon each other, or attack my enemies, and see what a power this is. But I will use it mercifully, for these are now my friends, and powerful ones."

"Your gift is very strongly developed," remarked Philip.

"Yes, and I will now disperse them," and even as he spoke the word, they began to squirm and crawl away to their various retreats. Soon not one was left save Karnac.

The three friends watched them depart in silence, and then with another look at the surroundings Philip gave a mental farewell to all that he saw, and proposed that they should enter the chateau to prepare for the journey which awaited Adrian and himself.

Together they entered the library, and Minotti gazed dreamily and sadly about his future quarters, as he realized how uncertain it was that he would ever again meet his two friends. What if they should never return? What if the influence of Lal Dhur should overpower him in their absence?

These and other thoughts filled his mind with perplexing questions, but above all, one thought reigned supreme and overshadowed all the rest—would they find her, the Countess? Would she meet Adrian once again, as she had promised on that fatal night over twenty years ago? Where was she, and how could he find her? Would she return, and could he see her again before he left this world—only once more, and then he would be ready to go. But let him see her just once again, as she stood before him in days long gone by. These thoughts were busy in Minotti's brain.

Adrian was also silent, and his thoughts were alternately gloomy and then bright. Would he ever see this Earth again? Would he be able to pierce the mysterious veil which separated the knowable from the unknown? Could he pass the shades of Earth, which he feared would oppose him? Where would he go? Where would he find her, the one being he most desired to meet?

Philip, too, was preoccupied, with his thoughts fixed on the immediate future, but he was not cast down or despondent. To him this was the happiest moment he had known for years. This world had looked down upon him as a pitiful hunchback to be scoffed at. In the other he had yet to live, and he was perfectly ready to try it at once. He did not doubt in the least the result of their journey. They would, in the end, find her whom they sought, and then—well, then, he would never return to this body. Never.

But here his thoughts suddenly ceased, as he noticed that both Adrian and Minotti had seated themselves, and were dreamily nodding in their chairs. He, too, felt drowsy, and would rest. Yes, he would rest, and seating himself beside them, he nodded in company.

CHAPTER VIII.

“SEEK ME NOT IN THE REALMS OF SPACE.”

And as they slumbered two figures appeared, side by side, and one was the tall and commanding form of the dark haired Lilith, while with her stood charming, beautiful Eve, who spoke these words:

“Adrian, my beloved son of an Earthly life, if you would rest content, seek me not in the realms of space. But if your father’s spirit is so strong within you, and naught can satisfy it save this journey, then may the spirits of the highest speed you to my side. I will await you, and we shall meet again, but content will not cast its influence over you, even in that hour of meeting. Farewell!”

The vision faded away, and still the sleepers stirred not. When they awoke, hours later, night had cast its shadows over the scene, and they knew that the hour had arrived when they must part—two upon their strange journey—one remaining to watch for their return.

All was ready for the test in a short time after the friends awoke, and Adrian held the vinaigrette in his palm, and gazed upon it with questioning eyes, while Minotti stood expectantly, yet sadly watching him. The portrait smiled upon the scene.

“Are we ready for the test?” cried Adrian, his eyes flashing with the desire of youth as he spoke.

“I am ready,” replied Philip calmly.

“May the spirit of the Most High protect you,”

solemnly said Minotti. "Remember the veiled figure and your waiting friend. Farewell!"

"Adieu, Minotti!" cried Adrian, warmly embracing the priest. "My body remains with you and my spirit will return to greet you. Adieu!"

As he spoke, Adrian lifted the vinaigrette to his lips and tasted of its contents. A thrill of joy flashed through his veins, and he stood beside his two friends, and calmly watched them gently take his body and lay it in the next apartment. He wished to speak to them, Minotti looked so sad and sombre, but although his words seemed plainly spoken, still it was evident they heard him not. Everything appeared as before to him, save that he felt so wonderfully light and buoyant, as if he were indeed a creature of the other world—a spirit shorn of its sheath of clay.

Was this really himself, standing so calmly there, seeing everything so plainly, and yet evidently unseen by others? Was there no pain attached to the operation of separating the spirit from the body then, and was it so simply done? An inner voice seemed to say to him:

"Pain is attached to the body only, and as you left that body in full health, and uninjured, there was no pain. Never will you know what it is to be ill or in pain in this state. You are free as the air, and are moved by your own impulse whithersoever you will. The cumbersome chains which bind the body are broken for you, and you are free to wander where your lightest wish would carry you."

As he stood watching his two friends, he heard Minotti say to Philip:

"Adrian has left us, and you, too, will go. I

wonder how far away our friend is at this moment?"

"How foolish Minotti is to think that I would leave them so," thought Adrian, and he touched the priest's arm, and then his cheek, and then his hand. But Minotti did not know it, evidently. He took no notice of it, and simply sighed deeply, as Philip took the vinaigrette in his right hand and held it on high, saying:

"Where Adrian is, there will I be in a moment. This shall free me from a world that likes me not, and lead me to a Universe beyond. Minotti, fare thee well!"

"Farewell, Philip!" and as Minotti grasped his left hand, with his right Philip raised the vinaigrette to his lips and partook of its contents.

In a flash he stood beside Adrian, and smiled calmly. But Adrian pointed rapidly to Philip's body, and to a luminous form just issuing from it, which assumed Philip's shape for an instant and was gone.

"What was that, Philip?" and Adrian's tone was quick and apprehensive.

"That must have been the gaseous element, or covering for the spirit, the semi-Earthly envelope, which encloses the better part of man's mentality. But tell me, quickly, am I still deformed?"

"No. Not a trace exists. You stand as fair and straight as the best."

"Thank God and nature that at last I am no longer a deformity. Never again will this Earth know Philip, the Hunchback." And Philip raised his clasped hands above his head, and glanced upward in a passion of ecstasy.

All this was said and done in a moment, and the next, they watched Minotti, now alone, gently lay Philip's body beside that of Adrian, and heard him sigh deeply to himself as he muttered:

"Would I were with them. Now my lonely task begins, indeed," and he took from Philip's lifeless right hand the vinaigrette, and gazed long and fixedly at its brilliant contents in the lamplight, as though he would fain follow his friends' example, and taste of the golden, flashing drops, which scintillated so brightly before him. Presently he sat down beside the two bodies, which lay side by side upon the couch, and resting his head upon the back of his chair, appeared lost in thought.

"It is time for our search to begin, Philip. Where shall we go?" questioned Adrian.

"Lead where you will, I am your companion," replied Philip.

"Then we will visit the planet Mars," said Adrian, "and now will with me that we shall go there."

"It is willed," was the reply.

As he spoke they felt themselves whirling through space at a tremendous rate, while far below them, rapidly growing smaller and smaller they could see this little world called Earth, shining at first, large and glorious, and then losing its brightness by rapid degrees, until it became simply a shining world in a host of surrounding worlds.

And now before them and upon them blazed an immense flame-lit planet of reddish glare, into whose burning atmosphere they rushed, and about which they hovered in indecision as to just where to alight. Far below them they could see the ascending flames, which spurted from the molten planet in many

places, while again there appeared black and desolate volcanic mountains, where the fires had apparently been extinguished but a short time, and whose yawning craters seemed ready at any moment to belch forth destructive flame and lava.

"Mars is passing through the fire period," said Philip, "and when in ages to come it shall be cooled sufficiently it may be habitable, but at present neither man or beast, or reptile can be found within it or about it. Mars has been burning thus for thousands of years, as did our Earth before it. Shall we search for the Countess here, amid the flames?"

"Yes, let us descend into that yawning crater and see what we shall find. I feel that we may meet some one," said Adrian.

"You are clairvoyant, Adrian," said Philip the next moment, as they flew down into the blazing crater and saw, seated upon the bank of a molten lake of fire, an aged spirit, whose white hair and bent figure were in keeping with the wan, thin face, and his sunken, but still brilliant eyes.

"Good day," said Adrian, alighting by his side.

"Good day, men of Earth," replied the wan spirit, "whom do you seek here?"

"How know you that we seek anyone?" questioned Adrian, brightly.

"All men of Earth seek something," replied the ancient shade. "They are never content in that turbulent planet. I have met hosts of them before, in the ages past, and they were ever the same discontented, unhappy race of beings. But it is not so much their fault, for the leaven of discontent is inherent in all who are under the shadow of Terrasal, and they, poor mortals, lay it sometimes at the door of Adam and of Eve."

"And what do you know of Adam and of Eve?" said Adrian, eagerly.

"I knew them both long years ago," was the quiet reply, "before they were first sent to Earth. Alas! They grew discontent, as have all others since their time upon that planet."

"You knew them both?" cried Adrian, aghast. "If so, what has become of them?"

"What becomes of all who live and have desires to live again? They re-appear at times, and in each new existence hope to find it better than the last, till finally the chastened spirit enters that bright world where naught disturbs them evermore, and each is content to follow his heart's desire forever."

"And where did you meet Eve?" questioned Adrian.

"I have met her many times and in many worlds, in years gone by," replied the old shade sadly. "If it is Eve you seek, beware of Lilith. They are ever together in this life and their final fate will doubtless meet them simultaneously. Eve will never be content without Adam. Lilith will not permit them to remain together. Seek not Eve if you would be content."

"What has Lilith to do with Eve that I cannot seek and find her?" boldly replied Adrian.

The pale spirit smiled sadly and shook his head. "I have seen others seek her in the ages past," he said. "For every Earth life she endures new spirits seek her when she leaves. And as for Lilith, you must know her history, and the reason of her influence over Eve."

"I know it not; so if you will, pray tell me."

"Then listen. Lilith was a rare and beautiful

daughter of Terrasal, the Earth Spirit. She was a true daughter of Earth, being evolutionized from the animal races of your world through centuries of slow development and pain. Race after race of zoophyte and mollusc, then of reptiles, later of animals and birds, lived and died upon your sphere ere Terrasal could finally produce a race of men. In time they came, and worshipped in their ignorant way the world which gave them birth. These races of men were not endowed with spirituality or great intelligence, but they were the pride of Terrasal, who loved them better than all his previous productions, and they in turn loved him. They asked no higher king than the grand oceans, the lofty mountains, the glorious sun, and the wonderful world that surrounded them. They had no minds or spirits to save. They troubled themselves not with the hereafter. They were happy, as the beast when wild and free is happy. As the bird with outstretched wings, soaring over the Earth, is happy. As ignorance is always happy when unmixed with the new desires and fears which invariably accompany an awakening spirituality and a dawning reason.

"Lilith reigned among them as their queen, a beautiful symbol of a beautiful world, and upon her Terrasal spent his greatest powers, and gave her all he had to give, including a certain amount of reason and instinct far above her race. A true spirit he could not endow her with—it was beyond his power.

"For some years Lilith reigned, and then one fatal day for Terrasal, a new being appeared, endowed by a higher power with full attributes of reason and a mind. This was Adam, a God-born, not an Earth-Born being. He induced Lilith to leave her people,

and mate with him, and ere a year had passed he cast her off, together with her boy, and mated with the God-born being Eve, who, like himself, possessed intelligence and a soul.

"They worshipped a higher being than Terrasal, and for this, and Adam's treatment of his favorite daughter, the Earth Spirit began a warfare with the human race which has continued to this day, and still continues. He has dominion over all things Earthly, over the bodies, and over the passions of man, which spring from the Earthly envelope, but over the true spirit he has no dominion.

"Eve was tender, sweet and loving. Lilith subtle, cunning and revengeful. Through Terrasal Lilith obtained dominion over Eve, who yielded her God-born spirit to the yoke of Earthly thralldom, and for this she was rejected by the highest power, and fell an easy prey to Terrasal, Adam falling with her, equally guilty.

"Since that day Eve has never known full contentment. She strives in new Earthly existences to content a God-born spirit which nothing Earthly ere will satisfy. Adam likewise wanders o'er the Universe, and like Eve is ever trying a new life in the struggle to satisfy his spirit, which will never be content."

"You speak of Adam and Eve being God-born. Then whence came they?"

"They came from that bright planet where contented spirits dwell—where I once dwelt—from Jupiter, the largest and the best of all the chastened worlds within the system of this sun."

"And you came from Jupiter here?" questioned Adrian.

"Yes, but not direct. I watch the vapors take shape and cool, and form into the habitation for the living, and then I leave them for new forming spheres, and ever move onward as the worlds advance. I have traversed many of them in ages past, and know that life upon them does not mean content. Therefore, I shun them when man makes his appearance, and seek a newly forming planet like this."

"And how long have you been here?" wonderingly said Adrian.

"Since first the nebulous vapor formed this sphere, and that is thousands of years ago. When Mars floated in space a mass of gaseous vapor, your Earth was burning as now is Mars. It will be thousands of years hence when this planet shall become habitable for reptile, beast or man," was the quiet reply.

"And what do you do in all these years?" asked Adrian.

"Repent that I ever left my Jupiterian home, from which I now am barred, and seek solace in seeing the worlds form and then decay," was the sad reply.

"Have you seen them decay, as well as form?" said Adrian.

"I have seen them rent asunder and scattered through space in fiery fragments and dire confusion. Look above you. See yon seeming little star which floats so calmly in boundless space. Know that this is one of the fragments of the greatest and most glorious world that triumphant time and battling elements could fashion? I watched that bright world rise and fall ere Earth or Mars were known to mortals, and the spirits set free then are wandering still through space and other worlds.

"Your world is peopled now with some of them,

for, in the endless chain of advancing and decaying worlds, the true spirit never dies, and lives forever restless until time and chastening fit it for an endless rest in Jupiter, the Nirvana of this chain of spheres.

"Adam and Eve both, like myself, had gained this rest by long and weary lives in other worlds, and having fallen from our high estate, and sinned against the Highest, we are still condemned to restlessness and discontent until such time as annihilation overtakes us, or our punishment is deemed sufficient, and we are again admitted to the rest obtained in Jupiter alone."

"But where can Eve be found, for find her I must, though it brings me no content," and Adrian's voice was sad, yet firm.

"If you really must seek her, follow me, and I will lead you through the stars to where she doubtless wanders, with Lilith by her side," responded the old spirit.

"A thousand thanks," cried Adrian. "Let us hasten there at once."

"Then follow me," replied the ancient shade, and as he spoke, they cleared the smoke and flames surrounding Mars, and shot like arrows into space.

"Let us not hasten," said Philip, "but as we go we can perhaps learn something of these many shapes and worlds we see around us. There is a peculiar one. What is that?"

"This is a planet where the waters are fighting the fires. See the deluge fall upon the molten mass, and as the steam arises, new rain clouds form and drench the fire again. In years to come the waters will drive the Fire King back into the bowels of this

sphere, and upon the cool crust formed around it, men like yourselves may live."

They sped by this elementary world, and soon arrived upon a strange scene, where seemingly showers of little stars were centering about a larger one, gradually joining it, and increasing its size.

"What is this?" queried Philip.

"This is a planet forming by the process of cohesion. These are the chips from worlds destroyed, which, flying around in space, join finally together, and form another globe from the remnants of those blown to pieces by internal elements of destruction."

"What are those elements?" asked Philip.

"Generally it is one element, steam. Your world, the Earth, is but a globe of molten fire, surrounded by a crust some thirty-five miles in thickness. As the Earth is some seven thousand nine hundred and twenty-six miles in diameter, it follows that there is between the solid shell some seven thousand eight hundred and fifty-six miles of fiery, molten matter, so hot that rocks and metals melt together in one seething mass. The Earth's surface is two-thirds covered with water. Let this water but once find its way into the fires below, and you can see how quickly your world would explode, fly into space, and be scattered far and wide.

"This is what befel that bright world which I told you of. A chain of volcanic mountains in action suddenly sank below the level of the oceans, and the waters forced the fires back with thunderous detonations till they reached the molten mass within. Then with one grand upheaval, and an explosion which disturbed the equilibrium of the sun itself, the world was scattered far and wide, the bodies of its inhab-

itants were destroyed, their spirits set free, and all their works of long ages flung into surrounding space so far away, that while some pieces of the planet struck the sun itself, others flew millions of miles distant.

"Your Earth philosophers call these pieces asteroids, or minor planets, and so far have found over two hundred of them. In reality they are scattered even into other solar systems, so great was the explosion and its force."

"That was a grand and wonderful sight," exclaimed Philip. "How long ago did it occur?"

"So long that new worlds have been formed from parts of the wreck, and races of men have lived upon them and have disappeared so thoroughly that these spheres are ready for decay themselves."

"And what was the name of this wonderful world that was lost so long ago?" said Adrian, joining in.

"It was called Neb, by its inhabitants," said the old shade in reply, "and here is one of the pieces of the wreck, which your men call Flora, the nearest asteroid to the orbit of Mars."

"And may I ask to whom we speak?" said Adrian again.

"I am Nebule, at one time chief among the spirits ruling o'er the destinies of Neb, but now an outcast from that dethroned world, and also from its twin planet, Jupiter," said the ancient spirit mournfully.

"Nebule! To whom the stars are young! Are you that great Hierophant?" eagerly exclaimed Philip.

"I am Nebule," was the dignified reply.

"Then we are indeed in the company of one who knows the Universe," exclaimed Philip. "Fortune has favored us."

"Say not that fortune favors you in this. Your coming was not unexpected," returned Nebule. "Eve told me when last we met that you would come, and I awaited you."

"Then you have seen her recently," said Adrian.

"I have seen her within the day," replied Nebule. "Eve and Lilith were present to you shortly before you shed your bodies for this trial, and to this visit you owe your safe exit from the Earth without a struggle against the powers of Terrasal."

"But Terrasal, you say, has no power over the free spirit," said Adrian.

"Nor has he," replied Nebule. "But over the Terrene envelope which still encases your true spirit, he holds sway. Philip shed his when he quit the body, for it was his wish that all things Earthly which encompassed him should leave him then and there, as he should never claim them more. But you are still encased in your semi-Earthly covering, and you will need it upon your return to Earth. Without it, you could not again enter the body in a satisfactory state."

"And what is this semi-Earthly covering? What does it resemble?" asked the puzzled Adrian.

"It is an envelope of gaseous nature, a part of that nebulous vapor which surrounds the Earth, and which all beings Earth-Born are enveloped in immediately beneath their covering of matter. It assumes the shape of the body exactly, and at true death of the body it remains upon Earth, while the spirit within it soars away, if fit to rise above the Earth. If not, and the spirit is filled with truly Earthly desires to the exclusion of higher aims, then the spirit and this envelope remain together upon Earth, until the

spirit gains such desires for higher things than Earth can afford, that it shakes off this covering, and springs into boundless space without it.

"It was these spirits and their gaseous envelopes which you saw in the Terrene Circle. It is these spirits which walk the Earth and are termed its ghosts. It is this gaseous envelope which remains when humans by accident lose a limb, and which gives them the impression the limb is still there for days. When it leaves, in such cases, it retains the shape of the lost human part and hovers over the Earth in this fragmentary state. Even now, Philip's deformed envelope is flitting over the Earth, under the influence of Terrasal, while his spirit is here, and his body lies in the keeping of Minotti," replied Nebule.

"You seem to know us well. Even our names are known to you without our telling you," said Philip.

"Eve gave me your names and histories. I have seen you in your Earthly trials at her request. You are not unknown to me," replied Nebule.

"Then Eve is interested in us still, and always has been," said Adrian joyfully.

"Eve is interested in all of her Earth-Born children," quietly replied Nebule, "and they are invariably interested in her. Women like Eve, God-born originally, are rare indeed on Earth, while Lilith's sisters are plentiful as drops in a rain storm. Those who once know Eve can never forget her, while those who love Lilith can be content with her sisters. Eve represents the truest type of God-born womanhood found on Earth, while Lilith represents the fullest and most glorious type of Earth itself, un-

mixed with higher attributes. Few Adams find their Eves. Many mate with their Liliths on Earth."

"And where are you leading us, Nebule? It is to Eve I know, but what is this great world that we are nearing?" asked Adrian.

"By its wonderful belts you should know that this is Jupiter, that bright world which four moons accompany, and whose mass is several hundred times that of the Earth, and much greater than that of all the planets in this solar system combined. This was once my home, but now I cannot take you there," sadly said Nebule. "No Earth-Born or rebellious spirit can stay long in Jupiter, without being thoroughly chastened and freed from Earthly and rebellious wish and thought. When you once reach Jupiter, never leave it, as did Adam, Eve and I."

"But can we not approach nearer to it?" asked Philip.

"Yes, we can hover around within its neighborhood if desired, but you will not find Eve there."

"And where will we find her?" eagerly asked Adrian.

"We will find her in Neptune, if she is in this solar system. It is there she waits, and repents of her Earthly experiences, which the power of Lilith ever urges her to again undertake."

"In Neptune. That is the farthest from the sun of all the solar worlds," said Philip, "and is so far, indeed, that from it that glorious orb looks little larger than Venus appears from Earth."

"Yes, Neptune is far away, and dark, and cold, and drear," replied Nebule, "but here Eve finds repentance, and hither flies with Lilith every age and cycle which the world denotes. Amid the snows,

and ice, and darkness of that dreary planet, she finds a fit companionship for thoughts as sad and mournful as the scenes around."

They sped onward in silence after this remark, for all were oppressed by the sad words of Nebule regarding Eve, and Adrian began to dimly understand that he might indeed find her, and still be far from contented. A vague feeling of sadness and dissatisfaction stole over him by degrees, until his spirit was as chilled and mournful as that of Eve herself. Onward they went, on and on, ever farther away from the sunlight, ever speeding into the deeps beyond, where outer darkness seemed to reign supreme. Jupiter was left far behind them, like a glorious world they dare not enter, and now they were nearing another planet, and by its rings and its eight moons they knew that it was Saturn.

They had sped many million miles since leaving Jupiter, and had traveled nearly to the other side of the sun, which at times they would fain have neared, but Nebule led them persistently away from it in an ever increasing circle, until now Saturn lay before them.

Red and fiery glowed this flaming planet, and as they neared it, Nebule said :

"This is a deserted world. Once in ages past it teemed with millions of inhabitants, learned and intelligent, but for centuries it has been decaying. Its primeval fires have taken complete possession, and are slowly destroying it by degrees. Already its oceans have been licked dry by the flames, while from the molten crevices of its fast melting crust, the sheeted fire spurts with destroying energy, and laps the solid rocks back to their molten state. No

welcome rain drops fall from its heated and parched atmosphere, and these wide bands of fire are but the red reflections of its ever increasing heat. This planet, having outlived its usefulness, is slowly resolving back into its gaseous state again. In millions of years it may once more become a habitable world, or float away in space and be lost forever to this solar system."

As Nebule spoke, they hovered over this decaying globe, and as they looked, they saw its fires leap upward with a fierce intensity, while a thunderous detonation shook the atmosphere. An immense chain of mountains suddenly disappeared, and melted away in the general chaos which prevailed, and where but a moment before the mountain chain stood, now seethed and bubbled an immense abyss, lined with spurting fire. The general destruction, so apparent everywhere in this old and disappearing planet, did not tend to cheer the spirits of the party, and they soon left it behind in their flight toward Neptune.

"Here is one of the most wonderful things in Nature," said Nebule. "It is an advancing comet, on its pilgrimage around the sun, and as you see it gathers the nebulous vapors as it flies. It will continue to gather them so long as it approaches toward the sun, and when it turns away upon the backward course it will throw off this nebulous matter. See, the tail is forming."

And as he spoke they saw an immense body approaching them at a great rate of speed, while behind it streamed a wonderful tail, growing larger each moment and longer, stringing out into space as though to girdle the Universe.

"This is a large comet, and its tail is forming at the rate of millions of miles per day," said Nebule. "It will pass this way, and you can get some idea of it by computing the time that it will take to reach the end. We are moving at the rate of fifty million miles per minute at present, while this comet is traveling at a speed of about two million miles per day."

But as he spoke, a tremendous explosion shook the air and reverberated through space, while nebulous vapor surrounded them upon all sides, and flying aerolites and detonating meteors sped by in every direction.

CHAPTER IX.

EVE FOUND IN LILITH'S POWER.

What had happened? Evidently some disaster had overtaken one of the celestial bodies. But what was it, and how did it occur?

"Quick, speed with me, and I will show you something which does not occur but once in ages," said Nebule, as he sped far away in advance.

But they kept up with him, and together they rushed through space at the highest rate known to the spirit world, greater by far than the speed attained by the electric currents. Soon they emerged from amidst the nebulous mass, and once again in free space they beheld a strange sight.

The head of the comet had evidently disappeared, and the tail was scattering far and wide in every direction in broken masses of vapor. Around the wide open of limitless space, as far as the mind's eye could reach, were flying evidences of some fearful wreck. Here huge crags and mountains sailed by, with their rent sides disclosing wealth of mineral beyond compare. There an upturned volcano, with streams of molten lava, and flame-lit interior clinging to it, sped swiftly into space.

What was this? Yes, it was the remnants of a once wonderful temple, fashioned by the hand of man, and here, indeed, were the bodies of men themselves, blackened and charred, but still men, dismembered relics of a dethroned world. Suddenly they came

upon a solitary spirit, and as he joined them Nebule asked :

"Is this the end of Amar, and her time has come?"
"Amar has gone to join the worlds of the past," said the new spirit, "and with her perished all her inhabitants."

"And what happened? Did the comet strike the ill-fated planet?" said Nebule.

"No, but six days ago the comet passed by Amar, and so close that its influence overcame the regular motion of that world, rolling her waters over the fire pits. For six days have the waters fought the fires, and at last they flooded the interior mass. You know the story, how the Steam King formed and blew the planet to destruction, as you have just partially witnessed. Its identity is lost, its people are scattered, and their spirits are now doubtless as I am, seeking a new sphere. The comet itself has been destroyed by the concussion, and its vapors dissipated. Farewell! Amar! Farewell! Spirits," and the new comer sped into space as quickly as he came.

"What shall we call you?" cried Adrian.

And far away in the realms of space, like a soft melody from a falling star, came the reply :

"I am Amarite. Farewell!"

Amid the chaos around them and the evidences of general destruction, the three spirits sped onward.

"Where was Amar?" asked Philip, and Nebule replied :

"Amar circled around another sun than these planets we have seen. Swerved from her course by the attraction of Neptune she drifted into the orbit of this comet, and destruction met both. Amar has been doomed for years, for had not this end over-

taken her, then in time Uranus would have crossed her pathway, and both planets would have been perhaps destroyed together."

"How far are we from Uranus?" replied Philip.

"Uranus, the deluged globe, is yet about one billion miles distant, while Neptune is still farther away by nearly two billion four million miles, as we travel."

"And how soon will we reach Neptune?" inquired Adrian.

"At once, if you wish it," replied Nebule. "But I thought you would prefer to see the other planets on our way, and so delayed."

"True, we would like to see them all. But is this Uranus? This dark and watery world that we are nearing?" said Philip, joining in.

"This is Uranus. Once a teeming world with millions of beings, now a vast wilderness of water. Not a blot of land shows its head above the surface of its all-pervading ocean. Fathoms deep lie all her cities. Under the eddying waves, far down into the bosom of the sea, where naught but the zoophyte and the mollusc live, can be found the remains of that once grand and beautiful world, peopled by the Uranites. I have seen them in their prime, while the fires were yet burning within their world, and the spirit of life was abroad among its peoples. Now its fires are all extinguished, burnt out ere the flood time came, and the bloodless species alone can live in its chilled waters, whose depths the sunlight ne'er can reach."

Nebule uttered these words in a melancholy tone as they poised above the lonesome world below, and viewed its waste of desolate waters, which stretched

far and wide on every hand. Again he mournfully spoke :

“No mammals here exist. Naught but the silent crustacean, the sluggish zoophyte, and the bloodless mollusc plough their solitary way through these chill waters. Where once the brightest intelligence reigned over all this grand planet, now but the first and most primitive elements of life exist. Little by little the higher grades of life were extinguished. First man, then all warm blooded mammals, then the cold veined fish expired. Soon even these primitive forms of life which now exist will disappear, and Uranus will remain a watery sepulcher among the worlds. A shaftless cemetery for its silent dead.”

Nebule's sorrowful tones strangely affected Philip and Adrian, as they hung for a moment longer over this deserted planet, and then their leader swiftly turned again upon his course, and they as swiftly followed. Turning back once to gaze upon the scenes they had passed, Adrian saw the glorious sun lighting with its splendor the cloud-capped worlds around them, but how very small it appeared now in comparison to its size as seen from Earth, and while its rays seemed to still shed welcome light, little warmth came from them. Already that resplendent orb was losing its power over the distant little worlds they were continually passing, and yet on they sped, while before them loomed the faintest twilight, ever increasing, until its sure end was total darkness.

“How far are we now from the sun?” asked Adrian.

“Nearly two billion miles,” replied Nebule.

"And does it indeed influence all things in this space, and keep them whirling ever around it?"

"All things within its radius for full three billion miles on either side are influenced by the sun," replied Nebule.

"And outside this circle do other suns at once assume command, or are there vacant spaces where no influence controls?" said Adrian.

"There is a belt of utter darkness round the dominion of each sun into which if the planets range they stop in space, and gain no further motion till some passing world attracts them once again into the influence of some sun," replied Nebule. "This is called the Circle of Silence, for within its radius there is naught but death and darkness. Night so black reigns over these starless circles, and silence so supreme holds sway, that many brave spirits have been lost within them for long periods of time, and some lost worlds have never reappeared from its sunless wastes."

"And have you traversed this Circle of Silence around our sun?" queried Adrian.

"I have crossed it, but all spirits avoid it when they can," was the reply.

"Like the seemingly endless sands of your Earthly deserts, with no landmark to guide for the mortal. Like the boundless ocean of Uranus, with no land to steer by for the sailor, so is the Circle of Silence in its darkness and immensity to be shunned by the spirits, and especially by those who know but little of the Universe, for spirits, like mortals, are of all grades. Some are learned, some foolish—some good, some bad."

"Then the freed spirit finds little improvement in

itself when released from the body, save that it is no longer held in leash," said Philip.

"The free spirit is the same in all desires and shades of feeling as the trammelled one, save that the body being cast aside, those wishes which appertain directly to it are lost, as a usual thing. But in some cases the Earthly envelope is still so strong that every wish, even regarding the body, still exists. Spirits learn in space as mortals do on Earth. It is not death of the body which teaches the spirit—it is life through successive years, and that spirit which sinks lower and lower upon Earth, can only rise here by effort equal to the sloth which let it sink before," replied Nebule.

"Then there is a chance for spirits to redeem their errors," said Adrian.

"There is a chance for all things to become better or worse," was the reply.

"And what becomes of those who grow worse in this state?" said Philip.

"They are given opportunities to improve by taking new lives and forms in other worlds, where their past here and elsewhere is forgotten, and where perchance brighter circumstances may lead them to improvement and redemption in the end. It may take many successive lives, and millions of years to save some spirits, but it is a depraved spirit indeed that has not some germ of good which may in time redeem it," was the reply.

They sped along in silence after these remarks, Philip and Adrian looking with wonder upon the many strange sights which space afforded. Far in the distance could be seen nebulous comets, while nearer and around them floated numberless aerolites

and meteors. Small miniature worlds were seen, which might have been the relics of some larger planet. Yet they had seen but one fleeing spirit, Amarite, since leaving Mars.

"Where do all the spirits keep themselves, Nebule? We of Earth think of the unnumbered billions of mortals who have died, and wonder where their many spirits go. And other worlds besides our own add to their number, yet we have seen but few," said Philip.

"There are but comparatively few spirits in space," said Nebule, "for as one body dies the spirit generally enters another shortly after, if not in the same world, then in some other. When it becomes necessary to populate one world, the surplus population is drawn from another. Thus in pestilence, in war, in famine, in deluge, and in many other ways are races swept from one sphere to the other."²⁸

"But we have seen no populated globe save Earth since leaving it," said Philip.

"No. You will in this solar system find but one sphere populated by humanity. Jupiter is the home of the highest free spirits, Earth of mortals, and the other planets are either decaying after a past civilization, or, like Mars, Venus and Mercury, are preparing for a new one in succession, as Earth in turn becomes depopulated and useless," replied Nebule.

"Which of the worlds now forming in this system is the nearest ready for humanity?" asked Philip.

"Venus is nearing the time when mortal man can find a home there," replied Nebule.

"And the populated worlds—are they in other systems, beyond the Circle of Silence? How then

do spirits cross from Earth to these planets?" asked Adrian, joining in the conversation.

"They are always under the guidance of a leader who knows the way," replied Nebule, "and yet even then they are often lost in its blackness, for spirits are not infallible, and newly entered ones make many mistakes. What would you have done, had I not been with you, for instance. You might have wandered over every planet and asteroid in this system before finding Eve in Neptune."

"True," replied Adrian, "and I wish we were at Neptune now."

"We are at Neptune," was the reply. "See yonder large world before you in the twilight?"

They looked, and saw before them a world of snow and ice—a veritable land of winter in its severest forms. Not a tree, or a shrub. Not a living thing. Not a particle of land or water lay before them, but waste after waste of huge and mountainous glaciers, cones of ice and fields of snow, untrodden for ages, appeared to their view.

"This is Neptune, the oldest and darkest of these solar worlds," said Nebule sadly. "Once this great planet floated grandly round the life inspiring sun, nearer by two billion seven hundred million miles, than she now is to that splendid orb of heat and light. Now she is well nigh beyond its influence, and is slowly but surely creeping toward the Circle of Silence, which will sooner or later engulf her in never ending night. Here our journey ends, and Eve is found."

"Where does she linger in these wastes of snow?" eagerly and yet sadly inquired Adrian.

The enthusiasm with which he had entered upon

the search for Eve had vanished in the contemplation of the chill world about him, but the deep love he felt for his Earth-encompassed mother, and his great yearning to succor and comfort her, were intensified ten-fold by his knowledge of her history and surroundings. So it was with feelings of mingled joy and sadness that he heard Nebule's reply :

"Follow me a little longer, and I will lead you to her side."

It seemed but a few moments later when the three alighted upon what was evidently the loftiest peak in that wasted world. Long years ago it had been volcanic, but for ages its fires had been extinct, and now the yawning crater into whose pit they gazed was hung with festoons of gigantic icicles for fathomless miles in depth. Huge glaciers swept majestically down into that wide abyss, coldly beautiful and clear, while the wintry winds of that frozen world eddied the never melting snow flakes from side to side over their calm bosoms. Between these huge glaciers yawned vast crevasses formed centuries before, when the dying fires made their last feeble effort to overcome their encroaching enemy, the destroying mountains of ice, and served but to detach huge blocks in places, leaving the yawning rent beside them to denote the dying effort.

Down, down, into that vast crater of ice they floated, watching the crystal sides of the pure and precipitous glaciers in the semi-twilight, and noting how deep and grand a cavern the Fire King had made for his home ere the Ice King drove him forth, until they came midway in the abyss to a huge chasm in the side of one of the immense glaciers. Entering it, they saw in its cavernous interior, with the crystal

icicles shining clear and cold about them, and the faintly falling snow flakes eddying around their forms, the beautiful object of their search, Eve, while beside her, as in all the centuries past, stood her dark and commanding rival, Lilith, wearing still her crown of the blazing sun.

Fair and beautiful as a dream of charming womanhood stood Eve, her tender, loving eyes turned ever upon Adrian, with a depth of sadness in them that stirred him through and through his entire being, yet, he could not spring to meet her, but stood wondering and fearing by her side, longing, yet unable to comfort or address her.

Then Lilith, in her dark, commanding beauty, spoke :

"Adrian, born of the Earth, and under the rule as yet of Terrasal, my Father, enveloped still in semi-Earthly Spirit, what would you here?"

And as in a dream, while to his senses the voice seemed far away in space, he replied :

"I came to seek the mother of my childhood—she who stands beside you."

A smile of triumphant power rested upon the full and sensuous lips of the beautiful incarnation of Earth, while her dark eyes pierced the spirit of Adrian through and through, as she replied :

"You were warned not to follow—yet you came. You were told that content would not crown your meeting—yet you sought her. In all the weary years since faithless Adam cast aside my love and tenderness, sending me forth in wretchedness and never dying pain, together with my beautiful boy, the child of the twin spirits, God-born Adam and Earth-Born Lilith, in all these ages, you alone have

sought and found her ere your time. Are you content? The mystery of human life is unfolded before you. Are you satisfied? Would you know more? Then seek for Cain, once my cherished child of Earth, who slew the offspring of the God-born twain, faithless Adam and beautiful Eve, and leaving Abel in the dust, sought again the haunts of his true people, the children of Earth. Against the God-born we were then arrayed, against them still we ever wage the unequal fight. So long as Earth exists—so long we battle. Child of Earth, Eve will ne'er be aught to you again."

As she ceased, Nebule mournfully addressed her:

"Lilith, Daughter of Terrasal, Mother of Cain, know you not that in the end the true spirit of the God-born will triumph over you—that you and yours will meet annihilation in the combat? What then will avail your vengeance, when the power you possess falls from you, and the harvest you sow shall be reaped?"

And Lilith turned her flashing eyes upon the ancient spirit and replied:

"Nebule, God-born spirit of a world that has fled, more ancient than the spheres themselves, you know well that the Daughter of Terrasal fears no end that awaits her? When the beautiful Earth grows weary—when its lengthened race is run—then will Terrasal, Cain and Lilith yield to the power which shall o'erwhelm them. But while the days of Earth still linger, while its races of men exist, we will claim them, ever, ever, and over their lives our influence throw. None shall escape us that are Earth-Born, over them all we hold our sway."

"Lilith, true Daughter of Terrasal, has not your vengeance on Eve been sated? Shall not her spirit return to Earth?" said Philip.

And Lilith answered :

"Spirit, shorn of all Earth-Born influence, know that Eve remains with me of her own desire. She would not flee from me, even to speed back with Adrian. When the round of time arrives, Eve and Lilith will both return. Until then let us rest in peace and solitude. Here in this dead world, this sepulcher of a long forgotten past, we will wait together till the call of my Father brings us again to the land of the living.

"Flee back to Earth scenes, Adrian. In them forget your birthright."

"Lilith, have you no pity? Finding Eve, must I leave her? When shall we meet again?" Slowly and painfully, held under the mesmeric gaze of those flashing black orbs, Adrian spoke, his mournful eyes fixed upon Eve with a tenderness and love so great that it would seem even Lilith would relent.

But with measured coldness she replied :

"Bring back to me my Adam, loving as first I knew him. Bring back Cain in his beauty, innocent as in his youth. Then you can talk of pity from Lilith toward the God-born spirits which dwell in the children of men. We may meet upon Earth in the future. Until then, seek us not."

"Since you decree it, and are powerful, I will leave, as commanded. But ere I go, tell me, Lilith, what has become of my father, who crossed into space with Eve?"

"The Count, thy father, is living. Filled with no dread of the future. Knowing no fear of the present,

he entered the service of Terrasal, and is now beyond thy reach."

"Can I not then assist him?" said Adrian in his sorrow.

"He is beyond thy assistance. Seek him not in his research. If he should break his shackles, you will meet him again on Earth."

"Farewell! Eve, my beautiful mother. Farewell! Lilith, Daughter of Terrasal. I will search the worlds for knowledge, and return in power to you."

"Farewell! Earth-Born, yet part God-born. Search the worlds; but know that never can the power of man draw Eve from me without I will it," and the dark eyes haughtily challenged the speaker.

"Farewell! my Adrian," softly fell from the lips of Eve, like a whisper from the shadows of that snow-bound cavern.

Then, while the snow flakes gently fell around the two figures, and the twilight seemed to deepen in that ice-encompassed cavern, with one last, loving look at his beautiful mother, Adrian turned sadly away with his two friends, bidding farewell to the scene. Quickly they mounted that vast, precipitous abyss, and once more they found themselves upon its rim, surveying the desolation of ice and snow around them.

"Ah, Nebule," cried Adrian in his anguish, "do you think Eve will return to Earth? Cannot the Universe give me power to free her?"

"She will return when Lilith permits it," was the reply.

"And I cannot assist or comfort her? Is there no knowledge that will aid me?"

"You can do nothing to change her condition,"

"And my father, also, is beyond my assistance?" inquired Adrian mournfully.

"He does not need it. He would not thank you for it," was the reply.

"Philip, shall we return to Earth together?" questioned Adrian, "or remain in space? I can tell Minotti and then come back."

"I will return to Earth with you Adrian, but never again will I inhabit the body I have cast aside," replied Philip. "I will wander a free spirit over the Universe, and be near to you if you wish."

"I wish it most sincerely, for I will need you more than ever upon our return," replied Adrian sadly.

"Will you return at once," asked Nebule, "or shall we wander farther into space? Shall we visit Venus and Mercury ere you go?"

"I would once more return to Earth and quickly, if it is also Philip's wish," said Adrian. "Once there, I trust that Eve will discover a way to come back, or that I can find means to assist her?"

"Would you not enter the Circle of Silence ere you return?" said Nebule.

"My spirit shuns that dark and silent circle," answered Adrian, "as if some disaster forshadowed my entrance into it."

"Then beware of entering it," replied Nebule, "and we will not attempt it. Look far to the East, and see that dimly shining planet, small, but serene. That is Earth, nearly two billion seven hundred million miles away. See the grand and distant sun, shining like a glorious star in space, unable to shed its warmth and brightness on this world of desolation and death. You have heard of a deluge of Earth, but ere we go, follow me to a scene of destruction

here, and witness what a frozen world possessed ere the flood and the ice encompassed her."

As he spoke, Nebule sped away, and the friends followed him. On and on they went—over the wastes of snow and ice—over the high and frozen peaks—away into the land of twilight and of death. Soon they came to a seeming valley, miles in extent, and down they sped into it. Down they went—through the cold blue ice—through the frozen waters—till at last they stood beside an ancient city. Large and massive temples graced it, grand and beautiful buildings surrounded them upon every hand. Wide streets led through it, while trees and plants beautified it upon all sides. Yet it lay fathoms deep in a frozen sea.

"This was the wonderful city of Hora. Once its people worshipped the beautiful sun, in whose warm light they breathed an atmosphere balmy and delightful. Come with me to their chief temple, and look upon a lost people."

Nebule led, and they soon found themselves in a vast amphitheatre, filled to overflowing with a large concourse of people—men, women and children—frozen in the cold, blue ice, as they sat or stood, with every feature distinct and perfect, denoting in most cases fear and terror.

They were a swarthy race, dark haired and dark featured, and as the high priest stood and exhorted them not to fear, it would seem the deluge overwhelmed them and kept them where they rested. Every garment was perfect, every detail correct. The wide, staring eyes, the gasping lips, the dilated nostril, the clenched hand, denoted that death had been sudden, but that life had made an effort ere

departing. It was a fearful sight, and Adrian could almost imagine he heard a great moan from the assembled multitude as he gazed upon it. High above them in the arched dome they could see an emblazoned sun, of pure gold, shedding its dying and cold rays over the scene.

"It is long years since the people of Hora assembled here to worship their Sun-God, and pray for deliverance from the encroaching water. Here many of them were overtaken by the cruel flood, and were trapped in their temple, while thousands were scattered in various directions in and about the city. First the water engulfed them, and immediately the freezing cold overtook the whole land, encasing it in a shroud of ice, so that no living thing remained upon this world to tell the tale.

"These people lived and died ere the planet Earth was born to the brotherhood of worlds. Years hence they will still remain, frozen in these ice-bound depths. No decaying influence ere can reach them while the cruel ice surrounds them, and as none of the influences which disturb the living planets are present in Neptune, it will drift into the Circle of Silence with its frozen dead, remaining there for ages.

"Their land was near to the resplendent sun when these people assembled to worship it as a deity, but now their world has drifted far into the outer edge of their Sun-God, while many of their spirits still live in other worlds and other bodies."

Nebule bade them follow him, as he ceased speaking, and together they wandered through the streets and buildings of Hora. Everywhere they met the same evidences of a life long since extinct, yet won-

derfully preserved. For miles they wandered into the dwellings, into the temples, everywhere. They found sleepers frozen in their couches, servants frozen in the kitchens, while animals were frozen in the yards, and mingled with the bodies of their masters, standing or lying beside them. Evidently the deluge had well-nigh turned to ice at once upon its appearance, and so Nebule informed them.

It was a strange sight thus to gaze upon a civilization so fearfully present, yet so ancient. Many of the buildings were magnificent and immense, as grand as the finest that Earth could boast of in history, and they wondered at it.

“Think not that your little Earth is the grandest world in existence, that it has advanced beyond all others, and that your present age is the greatest of the Universe. Time but repeats itself, and in their day the peoples of Neptune surpassed you in some things. There is nothing new in your planet that had not made its appearance at some time in the history of this. So be not proud above your station. Do not think you lead all Creation.

“Spirits, it is true, progress with every age, but the ranks of the highest who leave for eternity are quickly filled by the next in turn, and so it ever has been. Even to-day, look at the dense ignorance that prevails among millions of your people, and ask if they are nearer to perfection in this age than in the earliest of your history.

“In their day, this people thought their world and themselves at the head of all worlds and all peoples. It is a common mistake, made by finite minds, who know not the past of other worlds or the future of their own. More knowledge has been lost

in many things than your people of Earth possess to-day."

Nebule ceased speaking, and his words impressed the two listeners with their wisdom, which sprang from experience.

And now they entered the palace of the king, or highest ruler over the land. The magnificent structure was built of purest marble, inlaid at regular intervals with onyx, jasper, porphyry, and polished agate, while adornments of silver and gold were plentiful throughout the furnishings of the interior hallway. Everything about this palace denoted great wealth and fine taste.

Servants clad in gorgeous liveries lounged about in numbers, seemingly careless of their fate during the time confusion reigned in Hora. Curtains of richest texture hung before the entrances to the elegantly furnished apartments. Statuary graced the hallways, and works of art upon canvas were many and elaborate.

They entered the apartment of the King, and there, sitting in state, with his counsellors around him, they saw a kingly and commanding presence. Dark featured and dark haired, like his people, of massive frame and intellectual countenance, he sat a lord among his advisers. No shade of fear crossed his handsome face, and like his household he had met death bravely. On the friends passed, into the next apartment, the chamber of the Queen, and there, upon a richly furnished couch, lay the highest lady of the land, the wife of the dark haired ruler, Ahar.

Adrian and Philip noted the beauty of the form, clad in richest silks, and both started in astonishment

as they gazed upon the face. It was the face of Eve, yet not of Eve. It was a beautiful, charming face, strikingly handsome in every line, and so much like Eve that one might have thought them inseparably connected, yet a closer examination revealed that the lips were more sensuous, the entire face less spiritual, more animal, than Eve's. But the wonderful resemblance—how came it? And as they gazed, Nebule spoke:

“Wonder not at the strange resemblance between Elene and Eve, for one is the chastened, refined ideal of the other. Before you, frozen in the ice of centuries, beautiful as in life, is the casket which Eve once inhabited centuries ere she entered Jupiter and a higher life. Here she was a lovely woman endowed with the sensuous beauty of her time, fairer by far than her dark haired sisters, and beloved by all her people. King Ahar made her his queen, and together they ruled over one-half of the known world of Neptune, whose principalities and kingdoms bowed before them.”

“And does Eve return to Neptune to visit this once beautiful city, the scene of her former life, and stand beside this frozen body, as we stand?” asked Adrian, wonderingly.

“Eve has visited this scene many times in sadness and repentance. Sadness that her round of life, once completed, is again counted among the unfinished rounds. Repentance that so much of Earth clings to her spirit still, that ages will be required to purify it from all Earthly thoughts and wishes.” Nebule spoke sadly.

“And is it absolutely necessary that all wishes of Earth be lost ere the free spirit can gain an ever-

lasting home in Jupiter, and be at rest?" inquired Adrian.

"It is absolutely necessary," replied Nebule, "though some may gain entrance there on trial, perchance, with a little Earthliness still clinging to them."

"And has Eve lived through other worlds than Earth and Neptune?" questioned Adrian.

"Eve has lived through all the known worlds of this system which held life," answered Nebule.

"And have other worlds traces of her still in this wise?" asked Adrian, pointing to the body.

"No worlds save Earth and Neptune hold such relics," replied Nebule. "In other worlds the relics of both cities and inhabitants have long since been destroyed, and mingle with the elements which gave them sustenance. The fire which warmed them now destroys—the water which quenched and cooled them, now o'erwhelms. But for the preserving ice in this sunless sphere, all traces of them here would centuries since have disappeared."

"Since the fires of Neptune are quenched, and its waters are frozen, what then is its interior?" asked Philip, changing the conversation.

"Its interior is one vast cavern of cooled lava, scoria and cinder," was the reply, "for as the molten mass cooled it shrunk, clinging ever to the sides of the shell, and finally leaving an immense vacant space throughout the centre of this globe. Why do you ask?"

"I was wondering if it were ice inside as well as out," replied Philip, "and thinking that some day I would visit the interior of this, one of the most ancient of worlds."

"The free spirit can visit any place it desires," replied Nebule. "Neither fire or water, solid or liquid, can deter it. It enters through the solid walls, and into the secret recesses of the most hidden places. Nothing can deter it save the power of a stronger spirit."

"And is it true that a free spirit can drive another, weaker one out of the body it inhabits, and take possession of that body?" asked Adrian.

"It is frequently done. Have you not read in your learned books how the exorcists of old sent forth the spirits which had taken possession of men? Have you seen in your experience the spirit of some companion slowly change within him, so that within a few months you would not know him for the same man? This is an evidence of such possession. Sometimes it takes a spirit years to gain possession, sometimes it gains it at once, but the change can always be noticed by the careful observer."

"And what becomes of the spirit thus driven forth?" asked Adrian.

"It in turn enters another body, either through driving out the spirit, or by entering the newly born," said Nebule.

"Then there is a constant struggle going on between the spirits who inhabit the body and the spirits who are free," said Philip, joining in.

"On Earth there is a constant struggle between everything Earthly, and as the spirits there are generally encased in their Earthly, gaseous covering, they are engaged in this struggle. Since the world began, the survival of the fittest has been the motto of everything Earthly. The strong animals devour the weak, one element destroys the power of another.

"The brute creation is made up of animals that kill each other, and man is by far the most destructive of all. With his advantages, there is no living thing, either on land or sea, that can withstand him. Were it not for the vast recuperative power of Nature, he would kill every living animal which opposed him, and drive them off the face of the Earth. Many races of men and animals have succumbed to this fate, and are seen on the Earth no more. Man has killed them, either in wanton cruelty or in necessity. If the taking of life would send the human race to eternal suffering, few would escape it.

"So with the elements. The destructive fire gathers into its flaming bosom the cities, the forests, the prairie grasses, the animals of Earth, and in its turn is destroyed by the quenching water, which in its turn is reduced to steam by the fire, or to vapor by the sun's heat, or to ice by the freezing cold.

"So one Earthly spirit preys upon the other in the body as well as out of it. Perhaps one-half the world of humanity lives from its mistreatment of the other half, and it has always been so. Human nature is the same—always has been, always will be. Spirits encompassed by Earth, either in solid body or gaseous material, prey upon each other—the stronger upon the weaker—the more intelligent upon the ignorant. This law cannot be escaped upon Earth, and is only avoidable in that state of true perfection which comes hereafter."

Nebule ceased, and with one more look upon the casket that had contained the spirit of Eve, they departed from the city of Hora and soon found themselves standing upon the surface of the frozen world.

Adrian's heart was sad and his spirits downcast.

He had found Eve, but it had not comforted or contented him. He had explored much that was mysterious to him in life, had freed his spirit from the body, and yet was greatly disappointed and cast down. He felt as though his struggle had been in vain, and for a moment was tempted to renounce his intention of returning to Earth and remain in some other world. As the thought flitted over him it seemed that he was losing a part of himself gradually, and Nebule spoke quickly :

“Do not renounce your Earthly friends—remember Minotti.”

And as he spoke, Adrian felt anew the desire to return to Earth, and again his spirit was thoroughly encased in Earthly vapor.

“Can I escape from this covering at will?” he asked.

“Yes, for you have not many Earthly desires which bind you to it, as yet. But once you lose it, it will be difficult to find another, and without it you cannot remain in the body with any safety, and your spirit would be liable at any time to leave any body you entered,” replied Nebule. “You have much to do, so keep your envelope intact.”

“True, I have much to do, yet I am glad that I can escape with so much ease from this vaporous covering,” said Adrian.

“It may not be so easy later,” replied Nebule. “As the desires of Earth more closely embrace you, so will the Terrene envelope more thoroughly encompass you. Had you not been encased in it, you would have felt differently in the presence of Lilith.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that Lilith held in check your Terrene

envelope as she does that of Eve—in short, that she mesmerized you so that you could not speak with Eve, or Eve with you, as your mutual love would dictate.”

“Was it that which held my spirit in check when I stood before her? Then I will cast it aside and return.”

“Not till you have kept your word with Minotti, I trust,” said Nebule, “and then you will think it best to wait, as it will be. You could not free Eve, though free yourself, and Lilith could take her out of your reach if desired. It is better to wait.”

“I will wait, but when the time arrives, I will grapple with Lilith’s power for the possession of Eve and free her from that influence,” said Adrian passionately.

“Others have tried it in vain,” sadly replied Nebule. “But now my promise is fulfilled to Eve, and I will leave you. Follow that little shining star you see so far away to the East, and you will finally reach Earth. Farewell!”

“Farewell! Nebule. Shall we not meet again?” But he had sped far away into space, and no answer reached them.

Silence reigned for some time between the two friends, and no word was spoken, as they stood gazing over that melancholy scene in the semi-twilight.

Suddenly, without warning, a new comer joined them. Whence she sprang no one knew, but beautiful as a dream, she addressed Adrian by name.

“Adrian, last scion of the Balzacs, your father awaits you. Follow me.”

They both looked at her in surprise, and Adrian

vainly endeavored to recall where he had gained a fleeting impression of that pure, intelligent, beautiful face ; with its soulful, clear, greyish blue eyes, changing to violet with emotion ; the elegant, graceful figure ; the charming presence, and the brown, wavy tresses. Then she had also called his name. This was strange, and he could not account for it. Still she stood there, *spirituelle*, charming, lovely, awaiting a reply.

"And who are you?" said Adrian, "that I should follow where you lead."

"My name on Earth is Vera. Have no fear, but come, if, indeed, you care to see your father ere you return to Earth. He has much to tell you, much to explain. He will tell you who and what I am. Come."

"But shall not my friend also follow?"

"As he pleases. I was sent for you alone, but he will be doubtless glad to attend you, and the Count will welcome him."

"Where is the Count?"

"He dwells within the confines of another solar system. Far beyond the Circle of Silence. Come, follow me."

Though against his will and reason, Adrian felt impelled to follow this strangely beautiful woman, when Philip raised his voice in warning :

"Remember, Adrian, Nebule's words, and be not too hasty. If you follow this spirit into the Circle of Silence, how will we return? Our wishes will have little avail there, in the dead, negative influence of that circle, where few things are effective."

"And will you not come with me, Philip, if I go to find the Count? We have no ties which bind us. Why should we hesitate?"

"Where you go I will follow," replied Philip, "even to another chain of worlds."

Adrian hesitated, thought deeply for a few moments, and then asked :

"Can we return at once, after seeing the Count?"

"At once, he says, if you desire," replied the new comer.

"Then we will go. But tell me, ere we start, how did you know me, and my name?" said Adrian.

"I have seen you many times on Earth," was the reply.

"And was it your influence, then, which I so often felt at the chateau, and thought was Eve's?"

"It may have been, for it was there I saw you," was the sad reply.

"And Count Balzac sent you?"

"He surely sent me."

"And now lead on, and we will follow," said Adrian, "but first give me some sign that I may indeed know you came from the Count, my father."

"He bade me tell you that the sarcophagus contained but the shell, while I could lead you to the one who left that habitation behind, and cares not to re-enter it. He bade me say to you that Lal Dhur could not harm you here, that Tuaa could be brought to true prophecy, and Adrian to his own, through the Count, who awaits you."

"And said he naught of her?"

"Nothing," and a slight frown flitted across the stranger's lovely brow as she answered.

"Strange," muttered Adrian, "and yet all things are strange."

"Lead on," he said, and as he spoke, they left the world of Neptune, and sped through space toward the Circle of Silence.

On they went, on and ever onward, until finally they entered that dark circle where everything seemed silent as the tomb. Adrian and Philip kept close together and followed where the stranger led for hours it seemed, and yet no word was spoken, so oppressed were they by the silence and the blackness which surrounded them.

Suddenly they missed their leader, and in vain they called and searched.

They were lost in that dark circle, and how to win their way back they knew not.

CHAPTER X.

BACK TO EARTH—THE BODIES MISSING.

Five years have passed since Philip and Adrian last saw the light of even the smallest star.

For days and weeks they had wandered, sometimes reaching a stationary aerolite or world, but none were peopled, all were deserted. Weeks lengthened into months, and months into years, and when they finally emerged from the darkness and saw once more a faint ray of sunlight glimmering from afar, and caught sight of the starry worlds again, five years of Earth's time had elapsed.

Meantime Adrian had learned much from Philip, who imparted to him all the vast information he possessed and told him many things he had heretofore kept secret. Adrian was now as well informed as Philip, his teacher, upon most points, though he had invariably refused to tell him of that secret order.

"At last! At last!" said Adrian joyfully, as they emerged from utter darkness and sped straight toward the sun.

"We are free again," answered Philip, "and thankful I am to say it. I wonder how long we have been absent? It seems a lifetime."

"Aye, that it does," answered Adrian, "I hope that Minotti still lives upon Earth, and guards the bodies left in his charge. Long ere this he must

have given us up, and perhaps he has crossed into space."

"I trust that he still lives, and for your sake that the shell you left behind is safely guarded. As for me, I shall never again enter my old body, even should it be ready to receive me."

"I wonder that we have never been able to discover why it was that Vera led us astray into the darkness. She was as beautiful as the sunlight to me now, yet she left us."

"Let all thoughts of her pass from you, Adrian. Often have you spoken of her in admiration, even after the years of almost annihilation she led us into."

"But she may have been compelled to leave us, who knows, or may have lost us accidentally."

"Save your excuses. If we can but now reach Earth safely, and find things as they were when we left, I will perhaps in time forgive her."

"I have forgiven her already," replied Adrian, "and I would that I could see her again."

"You may, to your sorrow," was the foreboding reply.

Swiftly they sped in their flight, and ere long they caught sight of Saturn and his rings, but Earth they could not see, as far as they gazed over the wide Universe. Closely they scanned each star and world they passed, but neither Jupiter or Earth were visible.

On and ever onward they sped, until they neared the splendid sun, and though they felt nothing of it, still they could tell that it was shedding such scorching rays in this close proximity that everything in the way of matter melted sooner or later under the

fierce heat. Looking at it they could see that it was a molten mass at white heat, incandescent, and seemingly liquid, yet an immense ball of living fire.

Closely they flew toward it, noticing all the habitants of space, the aerolites, and meteors, swing around and around the sun and finally dive into it and become immediately absorbed. So great was the attraction, that for a circuit of many thousand miles, no celestial inhabitant was safe from annihilation in this manner. Philip remarked that the sun might well be called both the life-giver and life-annihilator of the solar systems. If worlds reached too near it, they were absorbed, and if they ranged at too great a distance they were uninhabitable and doomed.

"The sun is a grand taskmaster," said he. "Just think how it keeps all the other bodies spinning around it, and what punishment is meted out to those who approach either too near or range too far away."

And now they have finally passed this orb, and to their joy saw Earth, and Jupiter, shining far away on the opposite side of the sun to which they had been traveling, and whose fierce light obscured them. In a little while they should again be on Earth, and even to Philip it was a glad thought. Space was so different to what he had pictured it, seemed so desolate and depopulated, that Earth was far preferable to this continual silence of the Universe.

He had expected to find many spirits, and had met but very few, and some of those, at least, not particularly desirable in his eyes.

As for Adrian, he was anxious to return to Earth,

and see what could be done in the future regarding his beautiful mother, for often had he and Philip discussed the matter during their wanderings in darkness, with no satisfactory solution of the problem. They had not seen Neptune on their return voyage. Besides, it was not at all certain that Eve and Lilith were there now, anyway, so he wished to hasten back to Earth, and await new developments.

Swiftly they sped onward, each too anxious to engage in extended conversation about the matters nearest their wishes, for both felt a foreboding idea that something disastrous had happened since their flight from Earth.

"Do you not think it strange that we have been utterly unable to determine in this state what our experience in other lives has been, and that our present Earth life is the only one remembered?" finally said Adrian.

"Yes, it is rather strange; but as we agreed long since, it must be only to the truly perfected spirit, which has no future lives to live, that this knowledge is given. Still I would like to know something of who and what I was in other rounds of life, but I know not how to discover it," replied Philip.

"Nor do I. Everything is remembered of my life as Adrian Courcey, but nothing whatever of what I may have been before."

"We will question Tuua upon the matter, and since both of us are far wiser than when we left the Earth, we can probably elicit more information from the veiled image."

"I trust we can," was the reply, "for there are many things in which we need instruction. I shall

endeavor to discover who it was that led us astray, and the reason therefor, as that is a mystery I cannot solve."

Philip did not answer, but his glance showed plainly that this mystery was a distasteful one to contemplate.

For a moment they sped onward, and now they see shining before them the beautiful Earth, encompassed with her sheen of clouds and atmosphere. Soon they entered into the winds of this world, and found themselves in the midst of a terrible storm, driving everything before it over the tempest-tossed billows of the Atlantic.

Here and there an ill-fated vessel could be seen struggling feebly with the mighty ocean, which played with them as a giant contemptuously plays with a pigmy. Over the wild waste of waters no gleam of light shone, for it was blackest night, and the stars were obscured by the driving clouds, and the tempestuous wintry rain. From many terror-stricken mariners arose a despairing prayer, as they felt their hold upon this life slowly but surely slipping away with every fresh shriek of the howling wind, and watched each fierce billow striving madly to reach higher, higher than the rest, and engulf all which stood in its way.

Now as they gazed, far away in the darkness they saw the shadowy outlines of Terrasal slowly form amid the hurricane, grand and awe-inspiring. In his eyes again appeared that impenetrable, stony glare, unreadable as fate. Slowly the shadowy arms were outstretched, while the rage of the mad ocean grew more tempestuous, the fierce lightning flashed vividly in blinding strokes, and the thunder pealed

incessantly. Above the roar of the tempest, above the howling of the storm, they heard these words:

"Come to me, my children. Back to the Earth Spirit which gave you birth, and now claims you once more for his own. Spirit of my spirit, vapor sprung from me, return."

Below them, born amid the churning foam of the dark waters, a luminous phantom ship sprang from the storm tossed waves of the ocean, and sped away into the night and the darkness, to warn those whom Terrasal had called to his bosom.

Many a noble ship went down in that raging tempest, and as Adrian and Philip sped through it, and noted the destruction, they came upon one dismasted vessel, rolling heavily, most of whose crew had either been washed overboard, or had left the water logged ship to her fate, and taken to rafts or boats. As they approached, the vessel slowly settled and went down, while the drowning sailors, one by one, sank to rest beneath the waves.

They saw some souls and spirits leave their bodies and hover over the waters as if lost, while others floated away in silence, and a few attempted to save the shell they had just left ere it sank forever.

"Why seek to save that which is dead?" asked Philip, addressing one of those souls hovering over the body it had just left. "Why not let it go and seek to save yourself, your Earthly soul and immortal spirit?"

"Am I then dead?" replied the one addressed.

"Your body is, but you are not. You cannot die."

"Then if I am not dead and cannot die, I wish to save this body, and remain on Earth. I am afraid to die, and enter Hell, or run the risk of Heaven."

"But you are dead, now, as much as you can die on Earth. That body is dead forever."

"Strangers, I know you not, but for many years I have lived upon Earth. I still live upon it, and am not dead. I'll not die yet. This is a dream, and you are part of it. If I am dead, where is the Devil, or where God?"

"Search the Universe and find them," replied Philip, as the man's body sank beneath the waves. "In time you will know all that is now dark and mysterious. Farewell!"

"Farewell! No. I will follow you, and find the ending of this dream," and as he spoke, he joined them and they sped swiftly through the storm.

Now they have reached the land, and soon Paris looms in the distance. The spirit which had joined them stated that he lived here, and that he would now bid them adieu, as they had led him home again, and he dropped into the city.

But Philip and Adrian sped to the chateau, and when they reached the spot all was silent and deserted. The old chateau still stood in sombre silence as before, but with many marks of violence about it. Something had happened. What?

They entered, and a scene of desolation presented itself. In place of the well furnished chateau they found inside a sacked and ruined one. There was no trace of their own bodies, of Minotti, of Tuaa, the panelled portrait, or of the rich furniture that had graced the rooms. All was desolate and deserted.

They sought the secret stone staircase, and found the entrance filled with solid masonry, and looking as if it were a part of the wall of the building. They entered the tomb below, and found that alone intact—

the curtains, the carved face of Sesostris, the mummy cases and the sarcophagus—everything was there except the bodies, which were gone, and no trace remained to tell whence they had been taken.

Overwhelmed by the disaster, Philip and Adrian looked at each other in despair. What had happened? What catastrophe had overtaken the chateau in their absence? Where were the bodies and where was Minotti?

These were pressing problems, and until they were answered there could be no rest for either of the two friends.

Sadly they took leave of the tomb, the one link that bound them to the chateau now, and debated what should be done. Philip advised that they should enter Paris, and discover if possible what had happened to the chateau, and where Minotti was, for he doubted not that if living, Minotti would still be found at or near the parish of St. Etienne du Mont, which had been his home ere his visit to the chateau with Adrian.

So to Paris they sped, and entering it, they found the city in confusion, and the Jacobin clubs in full power. When they took the com^a drop, Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette ruled France. Now it was governed by the National Assembly and the Jacobins, whose deeds of blood were daily and hourly becoming more abhorrent and demoniac.

In Paris they learned that the Chateau Balzac had been sacked by the Paris communists, that the nobility had been abolished by the Assembly, and that King Louis XVI. and his Queen, Marie Antoinette, had been dragged from Versailles, and were now practically prisoners at the palace of the Tuilleries,

while hourly the minds of the populace were being further inflamed against them. He also learned that France was engaged in war against the allied courts of Austria, Prussia and Holland, and was torn by an unparalleled internal revolution.

This much they gathered from the excited and fiery conversations they overheard, and from the bloodthirsty harrangues they listened to in the clubs of the Jacobins, and all over the city. Everywhere confusion reigned, and no one knew what the morrow would bring forth.

They searched the parish of St. Etienne du Mont in vain for traces of Minotti. A stranger occupied his place, and they heard no mention of his name for days, until finally they learned that he had taken sides against the Revolutionists, and in favor of the Royal family, since which time he had disappeared, and that was some two years previous. Whether he had been guillotined, or had fled, or was still in prison, they did not hear.

This was indeed a dilemma and no solution of the catastrophe that they could give afforded much ground for hope that they would again find what they were in search of—Minotti, and the bodies entrusted to his care.

Day after day they searched the prisons of the city in hopes that among them they might find the missing priest, but to no purpose. Philip cared little for himself, but much for Adrian and the others, and as the days lengthened into weeks, and the weeks to months, he began to fear that they never again would find the priest or the bodies.

Adrian finally suggested that they should again take a journey to Neptune, but Philip opposed it,

and urged that sooner or later something would happen to put them on the right track, that they could do nothing toward helping Eve, and they might do much toward assisting Minotti, if still alive, by remaining upon Earth. They decided to stay.

Now the King, Louis XVI., was arraigned for trial, and it was a foregone conclusion that his life would be the forfeit demanded. The two friends had purposely* remained away from the guillotine, and avoided the sights of horror there enacted, but when it was announced a few days later that the King would be beheaded on Jan. 21st, the day after his condemnation, they resolved to visit the scene, for both were loyal to the King, even in his dire extremity.

They had frequently met headless souls stalking about the blood-stained city, but of course could hold no communication with them, as they were shadows, deserted by the spirit. They held aloof from all the many spirits they met in their wanderings, as the fewer acquaintances they made the better for the secrecy of their purpose.

On the fatal day of Jan. 21st, however, they saw among the many thousands of spirits speeding for the Place de la Revolution, to witness the execution, the sailor whom they had led to Paris months before. He greeted them, remarking that his condition was a burden, as he had been unable to make himself known to his family, and his wife was now receiving the attentions of a certain Cabot, a citizen of the new Republic, while he, her lawful husband, could only stand by and torture himself with the sight.

"Yes, I, Lantenac, cannot even throttle this monster of a Cabot, when ere that fatal last voyage I

could have killed him with a blow, and now I strike, and strike, and he but laughs, and smiles into Marie's eyes, as though her Jacques was not there to see," he groaned, as he shook his head with woe.

"Then at last you are convinced that it is not a dream, and that your body really died the night we met you," said Philip kindly.

"I am convinced that I am in a most unhappy state, and much different from what I was taught to believe by the good Father Minotti, when occasionally I had a chance to see him."

"And you knew Minotti, of St. Etienne du Mont?" quickly asked Philip.

"Aye, that I did, for did he not marry me to my Marie some eight years ago? And he used to confess her regularly. But now she confesses no more, and Minotti is dead."

"Dead! Are you sure?" Adrian and Philip both exclaimed.

"Why, yes, for he fought like a demon against the people at the old chateau near Versailles when we went to demand justice of King Louis, and brought him here."

"Tell us of it, Lantenac, and if you tell us truly, we will assist you with Marie, and send Citizen Cabot away," said Philip, with eager expectancy.

"*Mon Dieu!* if you but send Cabot away I'll be a slave to you," was the fervent reply.

"Then tell us quickly of Minotti, all you know, and I swear that Cabot shall leave your wife and never return," answered Philip.

"Then listen, and I'll tell you all I can. About five or six years ago, Father Minotti disappeared from our good parish, and none knew where he went.

He was given up for dead, and a new priest was appointed to his place, although none of us were very sure what had become of Minotti. Time passed and every trip I made home I enquired of Marie for the good Father, but nothing ever came of it, and one bright day for the people, I happened to be at home, when a great crowd passed that way, all shouting :

“ ‘To Versailles! to Versailles!’

“ ‘*Vive la Revolution!*’

“I joined them, and we marched to Versailles, many thousand strong. On the way some of the nobility insulted our people, and took refuge in an old chateau, but many of us followed them hotly, and broke in the doors, and made for them.

“The old chateau swarmed with our people; who sacked it and tore everything out of it ere they were satisfied.

“But while the fight was thickest, what was my surprise to see Father Minotti appear at the door of a chamber, and command the citizens in the name of Jesus to abandon their wickedness in thus destroying other people’s property. And he threatened them with the vengeance of King Louis and the church.

“This enraged the already mad citizens, and they pressed upon him so thickly that I could not get to his side, for Jesus knows that I would have helped him in this strait, he looked so thin and pale. Ere I could get to him the crowd had pressed him back, fighting desperately, until suddenly a shout went up that he was dead.

“After a little time, when the crowd thinned somewhat, I managed to get near him, and sure enough he was quite dead, while strange to say, the body wasn’t much hurt, and lay in a coffin. I told

them it was a priest they had killed and his name was Minotti, but they only laughed, and said that one priest less for King Louis would not matter, and that as for killing him, they did not, as he had killed himself, jumping into the coffin and taking poison. I made further inquiry if this was so, and one citizen showed me the bottle he had taken it from—a funny toy, and empty as a gourd in winter.”

“And is this all you saw?” eagerly questioned Adrian.

“Oh, no, there were many things I saw that glorious day, but that is all I saw of Minotti.”

“But do you know what became of his body?” queried Philip anxiously.

“I think it was taken by the priests of St. Sulpice, to whom word was given, and that’s all I know of it.”

“But the chateau, did you see nothing further there?” questioned Philip eagerly.

“The chateau, yes. It was a queer old place, and I heard it was the home of the Devil, and it looked like it. Why, the very room in which the priest’s body was found, was hung in black curtains, and contained no furniture save the coffin and a black imp of a figure, which the good citizen Antoine, the locksmith, carried away with him to Paris.”

“And were no other bodies found in the chateau?” said Philip slowly, watching Lantenac’s face closely as he spoke.

“Bodies, yes, the so-called nobility who insulted us were found, riddled and dead.”

“But nothing else? Think well, Lantenac, and remember Cabot,” said Philip earnestly.

“May Hell seize Cabot! The villain! Yes, I think I heard that two more bodies were found, already

dead, when we came, but I did not see them, and I afterwards heard that they were taken away. Perhaps some of the citizens came back after them, and sold them to the colleges. Had they but waited till now, they would not have troubled themselves, as bodies, 'specially without heads, ain't worth the carting away."

"And this is all you know?" queried Adrian sadly.

"All, only that we brought King Louis and his Queen, the Austrian, to Paris, and that to-day the guillotine gets one.

"*Mon Dieu!* What a pity it was that I died that night on the sea. How happy I would have been this day had I but lived to see it, and had Marie by my side. But you will help me drive Cabot away, and perhaps some time I may get back to her so she will know me?

"But see, how many thousands gather hereabouts, and how the headless ghosts still stay around the guillotine."

They looked, and the sight was indeed an impressive one.

The streets leading to the Place de la Revolution were literally swarming with all grades of Parisians, while armed troops by thousands were approaching from every direction, driving the people back and making way for a carriage containing the condemned King, who by the side of the ecclesiastic, Abbé Edgeworth, amid the continuous beating of drums and the hootings of the populace, was slowly nearing the blood red posts of the insatiable guillotine.

The lips of the King moved as if engaged in silent prayer, and the two gendarmes, who sat on the front seat of the carriage, turned occasionally, like senti-

nels of death, to watch the countenance of their distinguished prisoner. It was a sight which no civilized nation could look upon without a shudder—a sure foreshadowing of the anarchy and bloodshed soon to follow.

The day was damp and gloomy, and looking upward into the dun colored clouds—above the fitful, swaying, passionate mob—above the stern soldiery of the National Guard—above the terror-haunted guillotine—slowly but surely the shadowy outlines of Terrasal again appeared, dim, awe-inspiring and relentless. Again the stony eyes looked forth over his Earth children, and above the loud blare of the drums, and the mingled shouts of the people, while the souls of thousands slaughtered gathered in hosts around, Philip and Adrian heard these words descending to them from the chill and wintry clouds:

“The Kings of the Earth spring from and return to me. The nations of the world arise in might, and are lulled to rest in my bosom.”

The voice echoed and died in the distance, and when they looked again towards the guillotine, the head of Louis XVI., King of France, rolled silently into the basket—the gleaming axe had descended—the tragedy was done.

Once more they looked into the dun clouds for the Earth Spirit, but it had vanished, and no promise of a brighter day for France appeared.

One of the ferocious executioners lifted the bloody head of the dead King by the hair, showing it to the assembled thousands. Fanatics mounted the guillotine, and dipped the points of their sabres, lances and pikes in the blood of Louis XVI., and shouting:

"*Vive la Republique!*" waved them on high.

Salvo after salvo of artillery announced that the King was dead. The red caps of the commune waved fiercely in the wintry air, and armed bodies of men rushed here and there shouting the *Marseillaise*. But the hearts of the people at large were paralyzed, and the city was mute in answer.

Consternation and fear reigned throughout Paris that fatal day, and the remains of the dead King were hardly cold in their grave in the cemetery of the *Madelaine*, ere anxiety and remorse set in. The quicklime thrown over the remains could consume the Earthly relics, but not the peoples' memories of the slaughtered King.

"Now for Cabot!" said Lantenac.

"Lead on," answered Philip. He was in a savage humor now, with that France which had slain her King in cold blood.

They followed Lantenac to a small shop in the *Rue Jacob*, and there they found a comely woman, looking anxiously out of the door, and eagerly questioning each passer-by regarding the result of that morning's work at the guillotine.

"Ah! Marie, you still here? I thought you would have gone to the *Place de la Revolution* to-day, and watched the head of Louis tumble," said a soldier of the *National Guard* in passing.

"No, my Henri will tell me all about it when he returns. But did you not meet him on the way?"

"He is well, Marie, be not afraid," laughed the man, passing on.

"Henri is her Cabot!" said Lantenac, in a fury, "and she has completely forgotten her Jacques, as you see."

"Is it not better so?" answered Philip. "You would not have her mourn always for a shadow that can never comfort, support, or be a companion to her in this life, would you?"

"A shadow! I a shadow! I am Lantenac! Her true and lawful husband—the father of her children!"

"But can you not understand that you are a shadow, now, so far as she is concerned. Aye less than a shadow, for that she can see, but you she can neither see, feel, or hear."

"And will it always be so?"

"Until she reaches the state you are in, it will."

"Then put her in it, for I want her. Let her be a shadow with me, and I will ask no more."

"That is selfish, my friend, and Earthly. You should have higher aims than this if you would be really content."

"I belong to the Earth, and want Marie," was the reply.

"I cannot give you Marie, but I can drive Cabot away if you wish, when he comes," answered Philip.

"If I wish! I could kill him! Drive him away as you promised!" said Lantenac fiercely. "But will Marie really never see me again until she dies?" he added despondently.

"I can show you to her if you wish, but it will not satisfy you," said Philip.

"Do it," answered Lantenac eagerly

Philip stood in front of the woman, placed his hands upon her forehead, looked steadily into her eyes for a moment or two, and suddenly she sank in the doorway apparently unconscious.

"Now go to her," said Philip.

Lantenac sprang to her side, leaned over her, and imprinted kiss after kiss upon her lips.

"My Marie!" he cried. But no motion came to her form, her eyes remained shut, and she was still seemingly unconscious when he arose and gazed at her.

"Does she see me?" he muttered.

"Yes, as in a dream," answered Philip.

"Then wake her, for what is the use of dreams," replied Lantenac.

Philip again approached, bent over her, placed his hands upon her head, and in a moment she arose and ran shrieking into the house.

"I have seen Jacques!" she cried, "and I am going to die! It is a warning from the Holy Virgin whom I have forgotten!" and she bowed her head in her hands and wept.

"She isn't pleased to see me," said Lantenac, "and if a sight of me puts her into this sort of humor, I don't care about her seeing me again. I want her to love me, not to think I am a shadow of death, and a ghost."

"You want Earthly love in a spiritual state, my friend, and that is impossible with Marie, and she will only be afraid of you whenever you appear to her," replied Philip. "Cabot has taken your place in the Earthly respect."

"And will she never love me again?" asked Lantenac, with anguish.

"That is beyond my power to say, but she certainly never will in her present state," replied Philip.

"Then I care not what becomes of me," said Lantenac, sadly. "I thought by driving Cabot away she might return to me; but if not, then it matters

little, and I will try and stay away from her. Come, let us go," and he turned sadly away.

"But Cabot?" said Philip.

"The Devil take Cabot! But now I wish to leave here," was the reply, and together they departed.

"Farewell!" said Lantenac, "I may see you again. If not, forget me," and he sped into the city.

"Farewell!" they cried after him.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MYSTERY OF THE CATACOMBS.

"And now for St. Sulpice," cried Philip.

"Aye," answered Adrian, "now for St. Sulpice."

So they sped to the church, in search of the bodies taken from the Chateau Balzac, as they were firmly convinced that the priests of St. Sulpice had taken charge of all the remains.

Soon they reached the elegant edifice of St. Sulpice, crowned with its double towers. As they looked upon its fluted columns, and the two large shells at the entrance, formerly containing holy water, and presents to Francis I., from Venice, but now empty, for the commune no longer recognized the church, and sacked the sanctuaries for treasure, they sadly wondered where their experiment would end, and if they would indeed find what they were in search of here.

Silently they entered the church. Not a soul was visible, and the stained glass windows reflected the outer light in dim and uncertain waves over the high and imposing altar, and the pictures of the Virgin and of the Saints looked over the scene with pitying faces and imposing solemnity.

They looked everywhere for some evidence that would give them a clew to the discovery of that which they sought, but after hours of patient search were ready to give up for the present, and seek the aid of living man, when suddenly a priest appeared,

cautiously advancing through the aisle, apparently in trepidation lest he should be discovered.

"Evidently this is one of the Royalist priests who will not acknowledge the new order of things," said Philip.

Slowly the priest advanced, until reaching the altar, he bowed before it in silent prayer, his loose robe falling about him like a dark shroud, and his pale face silently uplifted to the Great Unknown.

Suddenly Philip sank quietly beside him, and the emaciated face of the pale father lighted as he prayed, with that expression of beatitude and rapture which betokened peace and content within, however dark the world without.

Philip waited till the prayer was ended, till his silent supplication was over, and then silently standing before him looked steadfastly into his peaceful eyes, and laid his hands upon his forehead. In a few seconds the eyes grew set and fixed, the body rose to a standing posture, and the pale lips moved.

"What would you?" he asked.

"Lead us to where the dead of St. Sulpice rest," replied Philip.

As he spoke the priest moved forward as if in sleep. They followed him around the altar, back to a little recess, and the priest pressed a secret spring. Before them a panel opened, and a stairway appeared. Silently their guide entered, closed the panel and they followed him down into the depths. Soon they arrived in what appeared to be a subterranean gallery, hewn out of solid stone and leading into darkness beyond, while similar galleries opened out at irregular intervals, dark and forbidding

"Whom do you seek?" came from the pale lips of the priest.

"Minotti and the bodies he guarded in the Chateau Balzac," replied Philip.

On they went, past the rows of grinning skulls, past the piles of bones and dust, past hundreds of dark galleries leading none knew where, for they were in the catacombs of Paris, those ancient quarries which run underground for miles and miles, and into whose darkness but a few years before the authorities had deposited the bones from some of the city's cemeteries. The Revolutionists were at this time, and had been for some months, dumping the bones of the dead into these silent galleries, and even the remains which had rested in the suppressed churches for years were frequently removed and placed here.

Finally the priest stopped in a rock-hewn chamber, through many of which they had passed on their way, and pointed to a square shaped pile of rocks, surmounted by a crucifix.

"They lie here," he muttered.

"They are not all here," said Philip, a second later with intense anxiety, after entering the pile, and returning.

"No, not all," was the quiet response.

"And where are the others?" asked Philip, with surprise.

"Follow me," said the priest, starting off.

"Wait," commanded Philip. "Lift the stones carefully and let us first bring these bodies to the air."

The priest went silently to work, without a word, while they stood by and watched him. His tender

hands, unused to such rough labor, were cut and bleeding, after two hours' work disclosed the top of a rude coffin.

"Remove the lid," Philip commanded, and as silently as before, the priest went to work, and finally the lid was raised.

There, exposed to view, was the body of Adrian, just as he had left it, now nearly six years ago, life-like and uninjured. It appeared as though it was asleep, and as Adrian gazed upon it he felt again the desire of youth to live, and be one of the Earth. At once he entered into his Earthly shell, arose from the coffin, and looked around him.

Where was he, and who was this delicate looking, red handed priest, who stood so quietly, with set lips and staring eyes?

"Who are you?" questioned Adrian, springing out of the coffin.

The silent priest made no reply, and as Adrian addressed him, Philip placed his hands upon his forehead and said:

"Soul of Earth, which clings to all things mortal, bend to the true spirit which controls," and as he spoke, Adrian's lips became as set, and his eyes as fixed as those of the priest beside him.

"Remember!" commanded Philip.

"I remember," came from the set lips of Adrian.

"Bring forth the rest," said Philip.

Adrian assisted the priest to lift the empty coffin, exposing the lid of a second one, which they soon removed, and there, lying before them, was the body of Philip, deformed, but lifelike. A curious expression lingered about Philip's mouth, as he said:

"Lift the coffin, and seek the other."

By hard work they succeeded in getting out this coffin, and below appeared the lid of a third, which they finally removed, and there, strange to say, lay the counterpart of the beautiful Vera, who had led them into their five years' wanderings in the Circle of Silence.

Philip alone examined the features. Adrian and the priest stared into nothingness as before.

"Who is this?" queried Philip.

"One of those found in the chateau," replied the priest.

"And how came she there?"

"I know not," was the mechanical reply.

"Look and see."

"All is dark before me, and no light appears," replied the priest.

"Fix the lid upon the coffin, and put this other silent body back in its place," commanded Philip.

They placed the lid over the beautiful sleeper, and then laid the coffin containing Philip's body on top of it. Then the empty coffin which had contained Adrian's body was placed on the top as before, the lid put on, the stones built round and over it, the crucifix returned to its place, and the pile looked as undisturbed as when they first saw it.

"Lead us to the others," said Philip, and the priest glided forward, Adrian following, Philip behind.

On they went, and now it became apparent that that they were in a single, long, narrow passage, from which few galleries seemed to lead. Still onward, following the lead of that dreamy figure in front, on, it seemed, for miles.

Finally the priest stopped before the seeming

solid wall of the right side of the gallery, and pressing both hands upon a sort of incrustation in one of the rocks, a stone door swung inward, and a medium sized chamber was discovered. They entered, and there, lying in a coffin, calm and peaceful, was Minotti, a crucifix placed between his hands, and a smile of content resting upon his features.

In another coffin by his side lay the figure of a stranger, a powerfully built man, unusually large, with strong handsome features, and one would say that if the eyes were open they would be black and bold, so brave and daring appeared the face. It was a face of power, of ambition, of will, and yet, withal, a face to be avoided, for it was as cruel as it was handsome and courageous.

Who was this man? Certainly one that Philip had never seen before in life. No priest, for he was dressed in the rank of a noble.

"Whom we have here?" asked Philip.

"Minotti and the evil genius," was the quiet reply.

"But who is this man?"

"Under which name would you know him?" asked the priest. "French, Russian, Italian, Spanish, Egyptian, or Mohammedan. He is known to all."

"Is this the so-called distiller of Life's Elixir, the alchemist whom it is said produces pure gold from his crucible, the charlatan Count——"

"Mention not his name in commanding power, lest he arise and greet you," calmly said the priest, in measured tones.

Philip looked with renewed interest upon the reclining figure. By what circumstance had it been brought here and placed side by side with Minotti. Philip could not fathom it, try as he would.

"How came he here?" he commanded.

"He was brought here, with Minotti. Both were found in the chateau," replied the priest.

"Where are we?"

"Under the chapel of the palace at Versailles," was the reply.

"And does this gallery connect with the Chateau Balzac?" queried Philip.

"It did at one time."

"And with the tomb below it?"

"Yes, with the tomb."

"Can we reach the chateau from here?"

"The entrance to the chateau has been blocked, but you can reach the tomb," was the reply.

"Did the priests of St. Sulpice block the entrance to the chateau?"

"They did," was the reply.

"And when?"

"When they discovered that the entrance through the tomb led to the catacombs, and this they did when Minotti's body was found. The entrance was closed, the bodies removed, and the priests hoped all knowledge of the matter was lost to the outside world."

"Where were the two bodies found which we have seen to-day—the strange woman and the stranger man?"

"They were found in the sarcophagus of the tomb," was the quiet reply.

"And what became of those other bodies which for so many years occupied that sarcophagus?"

"They had fled into the world ere the tomb was discovered by the priests."

"And do you know whether they still live on Earth?"

"I know not."

"Lead us to the nearest exit," commanded Philip.

The priest quietly left the rocky chamber, followed by Adrian and Philip, closed the stone door, led them a few steps farther, and they found themselves at the foot of a stairway leading upward, following which they emerged into the chapel of the Palace of Versailles a few moments later.

The panel by which they entered the chapel consisted of a fine painting of the crucifixion, and as the priest slid it back into place, it could be seen that the chapel had been seldom used of late. In fact, since the departure of the unfortunate Louis XVI. and his queen for Paris, surrounded by the mob, the chapel had fallen into disuse.

Suddenly, reaching the altar, the priest stopped before it, at a sign from Philip, while Adrian halted at another sign.

"What is your name?" said Philip.

"Father Le Blanc."

"You are attached to the church of St. Sulpice, and are loyal to the Royal family."

"I was attached to St. Sulpice, ere the Revolutionists suppressed all worship, and I am still loyal to the present Dauphin who will fill the place of Louis XVI."

"Then you knew the king was beheaded in Paris to-day?"

"I saw it, escaped from the mob with difficulty, and reached St. Sulpice," replied the priest.

"Then your life is not safe in Paris?"

"No man's life is safe there, much less that of a Royalist priest."

"Have you no home?"

"Since I was driven out three days ago—no."

Philip, at a wave of the hand, brought Adrian to the priest's side, and then, placing his hands upon both their foreheads, they suddenly knelt before the altar, and in a moment Philip pressed his hands again to their heads, and they looked at each other with awakened intelligence in their eyes, mingled with curiosity.

Seeing that they were in a sanctuary, and kneeling before the altar, in the twilight, both the priest and Adrian endeavored to account for their presence there in silence, for a few moments. Finally Adrian, at an utter loss to account for his position, but faintly recalling the face of the priest in a fleeting memory, said to his companion :

"Father, forgive me, but I know not where I am. I cannot fathom how I came here. Can you enlighten me? For a moment I thought I had seen you elsewhere, but it fades from me like a dream. How does it happen that we are here?"

"My son, I know not. Like yourself I seem to drift in useless speculation as to where I am, and how I arrived. This is not St. Sulpice, I know, and the scene is unfamiliar. I certainly have dreamed and entered here in sleep, unless, indeed, you helped me to this place unconscious, for I have been sorely troubled this day, and must have fainted."

"What ! are you ill?" exclaimed Adrian, catching the priest in his arms as he swayed unsteadily upon his knees toward him.

"I seem to be, in soul and body. My limbs fail me through fatigue, and my hands appear cut and bleeding. What mystery this is I know not, but I seem to have been the sport of the Evil One for

days," replied the priest, his head falling upon Adrian's shoulder.

Adrian carefully laid him down, and began a hurried search for some assistance. Rushing to the main entrance, he found it locked. There was nothing to do but try some other outlet, and with difficulty he managed to climb upon one of the sills, lift the beautiful stained glass window, and gaze out into space.

Beyond him, in the twilight, he saw looming the grand Palace of Versailles, and as he looked, a flood of memories came to him, and all was clear up to the time he had partaken of those scintillating drops in the vinaigrette.

What had happened since? Were the coma drops taken yesterday, last year, or when? How came he in the chapel at Versailles with this fainting priest?

These and other questioning thoughts ran through his brain as he anxiously looked out into the twilight, and endeavored to realize all that had taken place. It was useless. The thoughts escaped him and faded into nothingness at each fresh effort he made to pass the barrier raised by the taking of those wonderful drops. He remembered nothing that had occurred since.

He had forgotten the quiet, fainting priest, and as this flashed across his memory, he turned again toward him, and saw that he had partially arisen and was kneeling in rapt prayer before the altar. How pale he seemed, and sad. Was this one of Minotti's friends? Perhaps he could tell something of the mystery that surrounded Minotti, even if he did not know much?

Seeing that his condition had improved, Adrian

descended from the sill, and was in the act of advancing toward the priest, when a sound of grating keys struck sharply through the chapel, and in a moment an aged form tottered through the aisle, bearing a small basket.

Reaching the priest's side, the old man stopped, laid the basket beside the kneeling figure, and as silently tottered toward the entrance, without a word. Out of the door he went, his grey hair streaming in the breeze, and so quietly he came, so noiselessly he departed, that had it not been for the noise of the grating key, the basket, and the now open entrance, it would have passed for a hallucination.

Adrian slowly and silently advanced toward the kneeling figure, and knelt quietly beside it.

"Father," he said, "your prayer is answered."

"I trust so, my son," replied the kneeling priest, turning toward Adrian, "but the gloom is not lifted from my soul, and the sorrows of my people weigh heavily upon me. I have prayed for light upon the workings of this day, and as yet find it not."

"But here is one answer," said Adrian, holding the basket toward him.

So deeply had the priest been engaged in prayer and meditation, that the entrance and the exit of the old man had been unnoticed by him.

"Where did you find it?" he asked, as Adrian drew from it a bottle of wine and some food, and as the explanation was given, the priest quietly partook of the repast, which both enjoyed with keen appetites. At its conclusion, Adrian bound the priest's bruised and cut hands with the napkin, and then, feeling that the time had arrived when some explanation could be attempted, he said:

"Father, we are in the chapel of the Palace at Versailles."

"Then we are some distance from the mob of Paris," was the reply. "Are we prisoners?"

"Prisoners!" exclaimed Adrian aghast. "No, why should we be? The door is open, and this is a sanctuary."

"The mob care but little for sanctuaries in these days, my son, as you must know if you have been in Paris lately. Now that Louis XVI. has been beheaded by—"

"The King beheaded!"

"Aye, this morning, if my memory serves me rightly."

"By whom?"

"The Jacobins."

"And who are they?"

"My son, are you a native of this unhappy land and know not the Jacobins? Who are you?"

"I am called Adrian Courcey, and I am a Frenchman, bred and born. Yet I know nothing of these things you mention."

"Then perhaps you have been held a captive in some cell where news has been forbidden."

"Perhaps I have," was the cautious reply, for Adrian perceived that some time had elapsed since he had taken that drop in the chateau, and as he could make no explanation, it was better to say as little as possible until he knew more of those whom he might meet.

"You need not confide in me, my son, but if I can assist you I will do so gladly," said the priest, noticing the embarrassment which Adrian's speech partially admitted.

"You can assist me," was the grateful reply, "and if I can give you my confidence, I will do so at another time. For the present consider me one whose past is a secret, and whose future is uncertain, but your friend if you wish it."

"So let it be," was the reply. "Father Le Blanc will be a friend to Adrian Courcey, without question of his past, till such time as his confidence is willingly given."

"I thank you, my Father, and now can you tell me if you have ever met a certain priest, formerly of the parish of St. Etienne du Mont, called Minotti?"

"I have met him," replied Le Blanc, with a sudden start of surprise.

"Can you tell me of his whereabouts?"

"He has been dead for nearly three years past," answered the priest, eyeing Adrian closely.

"Dead for nearly three years! Impossible?" ejaculated Adrian.

"Not impossible, but true," replied the priest.

He then gave Adrian all the information he possessed about the matter, not omitting that Minotti's body had been taken charge of by the priests of St. Sulpice, and rested at that moment in the catacombs, and below their feet.

What he did not tell, however, was that Minotti had been deemed an apostate priest, and had, it was generally believed by his brethren, fallen into practices forbidden by the church. Knowing so little of Adrian, he thought it best not to mention this to him until better acquaintance gave him more insight into his character, but the next question showed him that Adrian knew more than he had suspected.

"And were there other bodies found in the chateau?"

"Yes, there were several, and all were buried in the catacombs."

"Strange," muttered Adrian, "very strange."

"You may well say so," said the priest, for everything was strange connected with this most remarkable affair, so much so that Minotti was supposed to have fallen under the influence of some of those secret societies which have enveloped Europe in mystery and which the church has from the beginning fought most strenuously," and again he curiously eyed Adrian.

"And will you tell me something of those secret societies?"

"I know but little concerning them," cautiously replied the priest, "but the principal society is called the Sons of Isis, and it has many branches, I am told."

"Then you think Minotti was one of these mystics?"

"I am afraid he became impregnated with their views."

"Why do you think so?"

"He long ago held converse with the mystic Count de St. Germain, and I am convinced believed that his claims to having lived in repeated ages was correct. Whether he went so far as to believe all that this strange man professed about being able to produce gold by alchemy, at will, and brew an elixir that should prolong life forever, if desired, in this body, I do not know. That Minotti believed in many strange things, I do know, and it is my belief that it was his pursuance of these things which led him finally to desert his parish, and take up a residence

in the Chateau Balzac, which itself was the home of the most ardent mystic of his time, and who, they say, was impelled to commit suicide, and kill his beautiful wife, in some sudden mania engendered by his study, or in despair at the loss of his fortune."

"Are you sure he killed himself and his wife?"

"As certain of it as that I am here," replied the priest, earnestly.

"Could you tell me anything of any especial mystical society that Count Balzac was interested in at the time of his death?" anxiously asked Adrian.

"He had the reputation of belonging to all the societies of mystics then in existence. But why are you so inquisitive upon this point, my son?"

"I had an especial interest in Count Balzac's case," replied Adrian, quietly.

"If these mystical ideas have taken root in your mind, pray here with me that the church will quickly efface them. I know of no surer road to eternal perdition than through the hold these ideas take upon one's soul," persuasively replied the priest.

"Tell me one thing, Father. Is it possible for one's soul to leave the body for a period of days, weeks, or even years, and return to and inhabit that body, forgetting everything that occurred meantime to the soul or spirit, and to the body?"

"You talk strangely," said the priest, looking at Adrian as if to read his thoughts, and speaking as if to avoid the question rather than answer it. He was evidently growing restless and uneasy under the drift of the conversation.

Adrian noticed this with surprise, not seeing any particular reason for it, though he had seen the priest's peculiar manner when speaking of Minotti

and Count Balzac. This induced Adrian to continue the questioning, for somehow he began to suspect that his companion knew more of this affair than he appeared willing to divulge, and if he did, it was important to get at it some way. But how? That was the question.

"Then you do not believe it possible for such things to happen in this day and age?" he asked, cautiously watching the priest's face for a clew.

Le Blanc suddenly rose to his feet, and crossing his arms over his breast, replied:

"You are a mystic, possibly an adept, yet you gave me no sign. I could not otherwise know you. To what branch do you belong?"

Adrian was silent at this turn of affairs, not knowing just what reply to make.

"Speak, you can trust me. See the symbol," and as the priest spoke he bared his right arm. Indelibly imprinted upon it, with India ink, was the Veiled Sphinx, just over the muscle.

"The Order of Isis is not yet conferred upon me," said the priest, pulling his sleeve over his arm again. "Now, you, who knew Minotti, who talk of the bodies in the chateau, and with whom I find myself alone in the chapel at Versailles, while this morning I was in Paris, and at St. Sulpice, who are you, and why did you bring me here?"

A bold thought entered Adrian's mind, and he replied, proudly rising to his feet, and likewise folding his arms, as the priest had done:

"I am Count Balzac!"

The effect upon the priest was surprising. His white face grew still paler in the advancing twilight, he tottered a moment upon his feet, and then look-

ing Adrian squarely in the eyes, he fairly hissed between his trembling lips:

"You lie! Count Balzac has been dead for years!"

"And yet he lives and stands before you. I am Count Adrian Balzac!"

"The son—at last—" muttered this strange priest, as he swayed back and forth in the twilight, as if ready to fall. But he recovered himself, and stepping close to Adrian, he said, in low, concentrated tones:

"If you are Count Adrian Balzac, what has become of her?"

"Of whom do you speak?" asked Adrian coldly, for the very thought that this priest had known his beautiful mother was distasteful.

"Of Vera. Of our peerless Priestess, who for over five long years has been with you."

"You are mad," said Adrian, recoiling from the priest, whose bright eyes gleamed in the dusky chapel with feverish excitement as he spoke, resembling two fiery coals in a livid mask, so set and white was the face.

"I am not mad," hissed the priest, "but you are, if you think to hold our Priestess in your power," and then he made a spring for Adrian, and they rolled to the floor in a fierce embrace.

The weak priest was no match for the sinewy, lithe young man, and his struggles become fainter and fainter as Adrian's hand clutched his throat with a grip of iron, for he thought that a madman had attacked him, and that Le Blanc had suddenly become insane. When, however, the struggle ceased, and he relaxed his grip from the fainting man's throat, he sat watching him with a sort of curiosity, combined

with compassion, for the priest was weak, and trembling in every limb from fear, excitement, or rage, and Adrian could not fathom the motive, unless—unless—

“You, Le Blanc, or whatever your name is, what had you to do with that secret society which ruined the Balzacs? Tell me,” he thundered, rising to his feet, “or by the Black Magic which you practice, I will kill you where you lie,” and he placed his foot upon the priest’s breast and stood over him like an avenging Nemesis.

Slowly and painfully the priest answered him, lying prone at his feet.

“Those who would seek for fortunes fallen must look far above such as I. We, of this circle, know nothing of such happenings. We obey and then forget.”

“Then whom do you obey?” sternly questioned Adrian.

The fallen priest slowly replied:

“All who are powerful and command us.”

“But where is your chief—your ruler?” still fiercely questioned Adrian.

“We never know our rulers. They are as impenetrable to us as to you. We seldom know each other. We but act,” painfully replied the priest.

Adrian removed his foot from the fallen man’s chest, and thought deeply for a few seconds. Here was a peculiar state of affairs, if true, and one that would puzzle him to find the solution of.

While he thought, the priest stealthily arose and glided toward the open door, but he was not quick enough for Adrian, who sprang forward and caught his arm abruptly. He was none too soon.

A stiletto dropped from the nerveless fingers as Adrian gripped the muscles of the wrist, and with a weak resistance, the priest was dragged back to the altar. Adrian lit a taper, and by its faint light, lost in the shadows of the large chapel, he again questioned the trembling priest.

"Did you ever see the Count and Countess Balzac?"

"Never, in life," was the faint reply.

"And in death, then?"

"Yes, in death," was the slow answer.

"But they are not dead!" ejaculated Adrian, terrified by the priest's evident faith in his declaration.

"Then the world and I were both deceived," was the quiet reply. "All Paris saw them lying dead. I and others gazed upon them in their coffins."

"This man evidently knows nothing of the truth," thought Adrian, watching his face closely as he questioned him, and he has been deceived about them as others were. After thinking a few moments, he abruptly asked:

"Will you take me to the bodies found in the chateau? I will release you then."

The priest thought a moment, without a word, and at the end, he simply said:

"Come."

Adrian lit another taper, the priest took one, they entered the panel, and descended to the catacombs below.

Adrian gripped the stiletto, which he had picked up when the priest dropped it, and carefully watched the figure in front of him as it advanced to the stone door in the side of the passage, and peered inside the rocky vault, beckoning him to follow. He

stepped inside, as the priest entered, following him closely.

There lay Minotti, and by his side the distinguished looking stranger, whose face and figure were utterly unfamiliar to Adrian. While he was gazing upon it intently the priest suddenly sprang out of the door, and closed it after him, thus imprisoning Adrian in the vault.

Just as the door closed, however, Adrian heard a shot, a cry, and then all was silent as the tomb. What had happened he could not tell, for the heavy stone door, chiseled from a single rock, completely shut out all further sounds. Something had occurred, but what? Adrian stood with quickened pulse and beating heart, waiting for some new development. But all was quiet as the grave.

How long he waited he never knew, but suddenly his situation flashed upon him in all its significant danger. He realized that if he would not be buried alive, it was necessary to at once get help from the outside, whatever that might be, whether thieves or assassins, mattered little. They could not offer a worse death than starvation in a dark vault of the catacombs.

So Adrian called lustily, but the room alone gave back the hollow sound, and he soon realized that it would be useless to look for help from the outside.

He had been neatly trapped by the strange priest.

Seeing that he must help himself from the inside, as the only chance, and that also, before the taper was exhausted—he calculated it would burn four hours—he tried the solid door. It opened to the inside, and so he was unable to move it, especially as it had no handle whatever, and was fitted into the

rock as a part of it. By gradually scraping away the edge, he might at last get a hold somewhere, and be able with the stiletto to pull it in. It was a chance—the only one.

But wait—suppose he could try his power over it, fully mastered, in his studies. So placing his hands upon it he willed with all his strength—but to no purpose. Stone was a non-conductor, evidently, and magnetism was useless. So he set to work manfully, scraping away a little of the rock casing, to reach the door with the point of his stiletto. He made some impression, but unfortunately broke the point off the weapon. This was a misfortune, and irreparable.

He arose to his feet and looked around. Suddenly his eyes fell upon the two figures. Perhaps he could find a knife about one of them. With the thought, he approached the strange figure, and suppressing his distaste, plunged his right hand into the coat, and began his search.

Not a sign of a weapon anywhere—but ah! what is this? And bringing it closely to the light he unwound a small package, and—behold! The miniature of his beautiful mother, the Countess Lena, Eve, looked with pleading, loving, spiritual beauty into his astonished eyes.

How came it in this strange man's possession, and what were these cabalistic signs graven so numerous around the beautiful face, well nigh covering the gold frame with their queer appearance and bright, sparkling jewels?

Here was a mystery. What did it mean?

The characters were strange to Adrian, who knew many languages, but not these magic letters.

Who was this man? One of the secret brothers?

Adrian hastily bared the man's right arm, but no sign of the Veiled Sphinx was found. Then he tore the velvet vest and frilled linen from the body, and there, over the stilled heart, he saw the figure of the Veiled Isis deeply tattooed in India ink.

This, then, was one of the Sons of Isis. One of the leaders in that strange and mystical band. And this was the sign by which they were known, which Philip would never disclose to him, in spite of all his questioning.

Perhaps there was something more, and with eager fingers he felt around the body. Yes, there was a paper, and bringing it forth, Adrian unrolled it rapidly with trembling hands.

“Faubourg St. Germaine,
Pyramid 4. Amenophis.”

This was all that the paper contained which Adrian could decipher, though below it were more of the mystic letters, or signs, seen around the frame of the portrait.

Minotti may explain it. Can he awaken him?

Quickly he takes one hand of the priest, places his free hand upon the sleeper's forehead—bends his will steadily.

He has not power sufficient.

Then he utters the secret prayer to Nature. It is still a failure.

He can do nothing this way, and he must escape. Minotti may have a knife.

Quick, search with your trembling fingers.

Aha! found! And with this pocket knife he rapidly works at the door.

Bit by bit the small specks fall. Little by little the stone wears away under the steel. Now the blade is broken. Another is opened, and to work again. Thus for one hour—two hours—three.

At last!

Now Adrian quickly catches the broken stiletto in the little notch he has made, gives a mighty effort, and the door moves.

Another, and it swings inward, leaving him free—yes, free!

But what is this? This quiet figure lying in front of the door with its priestly gown and its white, pallid face?

It is Le Blanc, dead, silent, murdered. But by whom?

Stooping over it, Adrian reads a paper pinned to his breast:

“So perish all Royalist Priests. *Vive la Re-publique!*”

This was all, and as Adrian raised himself he saw a lantern in the distance rapidly approaching. To fly now was impossible. He rapidly closed the door of the vault, and stepped a few paces back into the shadow.

“Halt!” cried a harsh voice, and a figure, clad in the French uniform of the Life Guards, with a tri-colored cockade in his hat, rapidly strode toward him.

“Who are you?”

“Adrian Courcey.”

“Do you know this priest?”

“He was my enemy, and strove to kill me. I never saw him till to-day.”

“Follow me.”

CHAPTER XII.

THE "SONS OF ISIS."

Adrian followed the taciturn guide, it seemed for hours, without a word, until finally they reached a large room where were gathered a motly assembly of queer looking vagabonds, evidently of the lowest class.

Some were stretched at full length on the floor, asleep. Others were engaged in card playing, and a half-dozen or so were sleepily listening to the harangue of a red capped, evil visaged, poorly clothed vagabond, who was giving his experiences during the day, and narrating his wonderful deeds of prowess, and narrow escapes from the police.

At sight of Adrian and his captor, some of the men banteringlly addressed his companion with cries of

"Oho! A capture!"

"The Gendarme has brought us a live prisoner of war."

"*Vive la Republique!*"

"*Vive les Voleurs!*"

One or two bowed in mimic submission before him, while the majority went on with their gambling or other occupations, generally slumber, and paid but little attention to the new arrivals.

"You may laugh, my comrades, but there is one priest less since the Gendarme left you, and that one is Le Blanc, who gave information of our band to

the police. I pursued him with some of you this morning, but he escaped in the crowd. To-night he sleeps in peace," growled the man, who now threw off his uniform, and appeared the true Parisian rascal that he was.

"Aha! Good! And who is the gallant young man?" said a wizen-faced old hunchback, as he peered into Adrian's face with an evil smile, "and how did you capture him?" He laughed in ironical mirth. "Is he, too, a friend of the police and of Le Blanc?"

"Not I," said Adrian, boldly, for he saw that he was in the midst of a band of those Parisian bandits who frequented the catacombs in these troublous times, and he knew that his safety could only be assured by complete renunciation of Le Blanc. "Your friend here did me a favor by his action, for the priest attempted to kill me."

"I did not see you there till hours later," said his captor, suspiciously.

"I was shut in a secret vault," replied Adrian.

"Oho! Another secret vault. These old galleries are full of them, and it was as well I found you, then, for you could not get out from these dark holes. You owe me for saving your life. Come, how much do you owe me?" insinuatingly said his captor, while those who still lingered about them looked on with amused faces. Adrian made up his mind to deceive his captors, and gain a chance to escape.

"I owe you much, and if you will come with me to the vault where I have been imprisoned, you can have all that it contains," was the bold reply.

"And how much is that?"

"Enough to pay you for your trouble in guiding me to your friends."

"But how much? It's a long way back, and I want to know what it brings."

"It will pay you for your pains, but the exact amount I do not know."

"Then we will go back to-morrow," growled the man, as he joined his comrades, furtively watching Adrian to see if he attempted to escape into the shadows.

Adrian thought quickly at all times, and he resolved to assume slumber, and then, if possible, slip away into the darkness at some time during the coming hours. It was always night in these dark caverns, and he pondered deeply, wondering how he could best guide himself should he plunge into their shadows.

All the tales he had read or heard about the catacombs rushed into his memory, as he lay upon some matting, and thought over his adventure. So many had been lost in its vast galleries, starved, never found, that he began to revolve in his mind the chances in favor of his escape, and they appeared few and small compared with those of being eternally entombed in these black passages and caverns.

And yet he must escape, and discover the whereabouts of that band—but, wait, it is barely possible that some of these motly vagabonds may know something, and he arose with the thought, and carefully studied the faces within his view.

Nothing there but vice and crime, evidently. Then he walked to his captor, and stood watching the game in which he was engaged.

It must have been nearly morning, he judged, as he looked at them, for they were almost alone in

their wakefulness, and slumber had fallen upon the rest generally.

Suddenly his attention was riveted upon a dark faced, black eyed man, seemingly an Italian, from his looks, who was sleepily watching the players, as he reclined upon a dirty mat near them.

But it was not his face that attracted Adrian. No, that was ordinary, and stamped with the mark of villainy, but it was the figure of the Veiled Sphynx, tattooed upon his right arm, just over the muscle, with a bridle in its mouth.

The curious tattooing showed plainly in the light, as he rested his head upon the other arm, and flung this one freely by his side.

Here was, then, another member of that secret band, and Adrian slowly advanced toward him, and sat down by his side. Presently he quietly turned to the man, and pointing to the tattooing, said:

"That is a queer looking piece of work. Could you tell me what it means, or what kind of an animal it is?"

The man sleepily turned toward him, and lazily replied:

"Yes, it is a queer looking thing, and a good many have asked me about it, but I never could find out how it got there, or what it was. P'rhaps you can tell me," and he laughed grimly, "for by the Holy Virgin, I can't tell you."

"You mean that you don't care to," said Adrian, carelessly.

"I mean that I don't know," he replied with a frown.

"*Dannamento!* I wish the thing was out."

He savagely slapped his hand over the spot to

conceal it from view, and rolled over, closing his eyes as if weary and ready for sleep.

Is this man lying, thought Adrian, or can it be possible that he really knows nothing of this peculiar mark, and of those that use it. He pondered long over this, until finally the game was ended, and his captor said :

“Don’t you sleep, or are you always open-eyed?”

The man’s companions laughed, it seemed with unnecessary mirth, until finally one said :

“Search him now, awake. You’ll get what he has, anyway,” and he laughed merrily at his suggestion.

“Hand over,” said the captor.

“I have nothing,” replied Adrian, uneasily. He did not in any event propose to lose that portrait and the piece of paper, “but you will be well repaid to-morrow.”

“As you please,” returned the other, turning aside with a wink at his companions, as much as to say, “Wait till he is asleep ; it is less trouble.”

Adrian caught the wink, but did not exactly understand its purport. He became uneasy and nervous, and imagined that half those who slumbered were awake, waiting to catch him asleep, and this thought effectually banished slumber from his eyes.

The Italian rolled uneasily upon his mat, and Adrian saw the hilt of a poniard glitter in his belt.

“Who is he,” he deeply thought. “If I but knew his name—”

“Mateo Spinoza,” said the Italian sleepily, as if in answer to the secret wish.

“Hey! Mateo! Mateo! Awake! You’re not

going to have 'nother fit, are you?" said one of the gang, shaking him vigorously.

"What's the matter?" said the Italian, at this moment, opening his eyes, "*Maledetto!* Can't you let a man rest?"

"He's all right," said one, "and now let's to rest and be up to rule France in the morning, for we're all kings, now that the royal head of Louis has tumbled. The people are the kings, and we are the people, eh, Gendarme?" and he slapped the other vagabond on the shoulder with a mirthless grin at the jest.

The rascally Gendarme made no reply to this, but gruffly pointed out a mat for Adrian to rest upon. Then, with the others, he laid down to sleep.

From the moment the Italian had answered to his powerful secret wish Adrian felt relieved. He knew that the man was one of the tools of the Sons of Isis, but that such a vagabond was admitted to even the very lowest of their bands was surprising to him, and the man's ignorance he had no faith in, believing it assumed for a purpose before his rascally companions.

For some time he lay quietly thinking, and when all the band appeared asleep, he willed the Italian to cautiously come to his side.

Mateo slowly and silently arose, glanced cautiously about, carefully picked his way, and stood beside Adrian, who also arose, and together they quietly stole out of the chamber, each taking a lantern, and Adrian a sheath knife which he found beside one of the thieves.

After they had travelled for about half an hour, Adrian questioned the man, whose set lips and

glassy, unintelligent eyes, showed him fully under the influence of the questioner.

"Where are you leading me?" he quietly asked.

"Away from them. Anywhere you say," was the reply.

But as he spoke, Adrian saw a dark figure behind, cautiously following them, while keeping in the shadow.

For a moment he thought he would arouse Mateo from his condition, but this was dangerous to all his plans of escape, and the next instant he willed the Italian to follow him, and they quickly darted into a side gallery. Adrian turned down the lights, put his coat over the lanterns, and waited.

In a moment he heard the man advancing rapidly in pursuit. Suddenly he stopped, listened a moment, and then savagely muttered to himself:

"Mateo shall die for this to-morrow. Traitor, with his fits of treachery. Bijard may tell us of Mesmerism, and sleep walking, and what not, but this is thievish treachery, and he dies. Bah! The robber! The thief!"

By an accident the coat partially slipped from the lanterns, and a ray of light disclosed their hiding place.

With a yell the man dashed forward.

Too late! Quick as thought the light was again covered, and Mateo arose, knife in hand, to meet his enemy at Adrian's wish.

It was an unequal combat. Mateo, in his condition, could see perfectly in the darkest cavern through Adrian's will, while his adversary was no better than a blind man in this pitchy blackness. It seemed but a moment ere a shriek pierced the gal-

leries, and then all was quiet. Silently and quickly the knife had done its work.

Adrian uncovered the lanterns and looked at him.

"Who is he?"

"He was the Wizard," replied Mateo, mechanically.

"Where are we now?"

The Italian thought a moment, felt of the walls, and replied:

"Under the Seine, near Notre Dame."

"How do you tell?"

"By the water which runs on the walls, and by this," and he pointed to the rocky ceiling, where dimly visible appeared what at first Adrian thought was mould, but which upon closer examination he discovered was a representation of Notre Dame.

"And in this labyrinth can you tell where you are at all times?"

"Not always, but sometimes. The places are given on the wall by showing the picture of the house above it."

"How far are we from the nearest outlet, to the world above?"

"But a few steps, if you will enter one of the retreats of my comrades above ground."

"No, we will seek some other outlet."

"Then it is farther. The Church of St. Etienne du Mont is the next nearest."

"Let us go there," and as Adrian said the words, they rapidly moved onward, and in a short time reached the stairway, leading into the church.

"And, now, what does this mean?" and Adrian touched the tattooed figure on the man's arm.

"I don't know," was the reply.

"He speaks the truth," muttered Adrian. "No one can lie in this state when willed to tell the truth," and he shook his head in perplexity.

What manner of people were these, whose tracks were so deeply veiled in mystery, that even those who bore the mystic imprint of their secret society could tell nothing of them? This one evidently did not even know what that imprint meant.

"Have you ever heard of the Sons of Isis?"

"No."

"And know absolutely nothing of any secret order imprinting this design upon its members?"

"I know nothing of it."

"He is simply a blind tool," muttered Adrian, "and they use him in this state only, so that when he wakes he knows absolutely nothing."

"Absolutely nothing," repeated the automaton, mechanically.

"And they mark him, so that when the powerful ones see the imprint, they know him for a blind tool," said Adrian.

"A blind tool," again mechanically muttered the man.

"Did you ever meet any one having a similar imprint on their right arm?"

"Yes."

"And they could tell you nothing?"

"Some couldn't—others wouldn't."

"Can you mention any who refused to tell you when questioned?"

"Citizen Cabot, of the Rue Jacob, a gendarme, knows of this mark. He has one like it, and won't answer."

"And who besides?"

"Citizen Antoine, the locksmith of the Rue Dauphine, has one like it, and won't answer."

"Good. Lead me to the street, through the church, and you can then go. But remember when I want you, I will call, and you will come."

"I will come," and the figure moved up the stairs, followed by Adrian.

They entered the church, Mateo knowing the secret of the opening, and finding the door open, walked into the street. There Adrian placed his hands upon the man's forehead, and he gave a slight start, passed his hands to his head in a bewildered way, and looked in a dazed manner at Adrian.

"Where am I? By the Virgin, I've had another fit," he exclaimed, in an angry tone.

"Yes, you have had a bad attack," said Adrian, "but you will get over it now, and I will leave you. Good-night!"

"Good-night!" replied the man, who had now fully recovered consciousness, and was still wondering how he happened to be wandering in the street, with a lantern in his hand.

But Adrian, who had cast his lantern aside, hurried onward, for even at this early hour, with the first grey streak of approaching dawn lighting the eastern sky, the streets of the city were showing some signs of life, and he wished to secure a little sleep before the day fully opened, for then he must see the Citizen Antoine, and perhaps Cabot. He quickly secured a room in the Rue Lacedepede, and retiring, slept heavily until nearly noon. Then he arose, and quickly dressing, started out to find the Citizen Antoine, in the Rue Dauphine.

After considerable search he finally found the

shop, but Antoine was absent, and Adrian remained awaiting his arrival. While sitting there, impatiently waiting for the locksmith, his attention was attracted by a peculiar looking object, the black head of a veiled figure, which, covered with dust, and the rest of it invisible under a pile of debris, was still strangely familiar.

With a cry of joy Adrian sprang towards it, and rapidly uncovering the figure, there stood before him, fallen from her pedestal, begrimed with dirt and dust, but still intact, the wonderful image of the Chateau Balzac—Tuua.

Adrian could have cried for joy at the sight, for at last he had found a true adviser, who told no tales outside, and—

But at this moment Citizen Antoine appeared in the doorway, and stepping toward the enrapt Adrian, said :

“Excuse me, Monsieur wishes to buy the image?”

“How much do you ask for it?” was the cautious reply.

Antoine measured his customer from head to foot, and then said :

“It is a fine figure, an heirloom of the family, which my sainted father received from his great grandfather—the Virgin rest his soul in peace. But times are hard, Monsieur, times are very hard, and since the noblesse are losing their heads daily, works of art like this are not in great demand, What will you give for it?”

“I will give you fifty francs for it, if you will hold it for me till this time to-morrow,” was the slow reply.

“Fifty francs is not much for an heirloom, but

come to-morrow and you may have it. Only don't serve me the shabby trick another did. He was an Englishman, and offered me two hundred francs for it, and like Monsieur, was to 'call to-morrow.' But the guillotine claimed him next day, for Robespierre had so little sympathy with me, in that matter, although I am a good citizen of the Republic," and Antoine sighed ruefully as he spoke.

"It is a bargain then," said Adrian, "and now what do you suppose the Englishman wanted with an image like this?"

"Oh, he was impressed with it because he had a friend who had a birthmark like it over his heart, he claimed. In fact this strange man had one himself, for I helped take care of the body, when his head rolled into the basket, in hopes that his relations would fill his contract with me, and take the figure, especially if I brought his body to them, But, alas! His relatives, too, were guillotined the following day, and all my time was wasted."

"But his friend, who also had this birthmark, did not he want the image?" said Adrian carelessly.

"I never saw him, Monsieur."

"And did you never meet anyone else with such a mark?" asked Adrian, looking him squarely in the eyes as he spoke, as if to compel an honest answer.

"Never, Monsieur," was the reply, and Adrian was surprised to find such an answer, and more so as he could plainly see that he had no effect over this man, as yet, at least. He could not bring him under control. His questions did not disconcert him in the least.

This was strange, again, for if Antoine knew any-

thing, he must know that this mark was the private one of the Sons of Isis, and yet he had spoken of it as carelessly and openly as though it really was a peculiar birthmark, and nothing else.

Adrian was puzzled. It seemed at every step he made in this direction he met those who ought to know, and did not. But he was convinced from Mateo's words that Antoine knew something at least. Wishing to obtain the image however, and not caring to excite Antoine's suspicions before getting it, he at last bade the locksmith good-day, and departed, promising to call the following day at the same hour and take the ebony figure.

"How shall I get the fifty francs?" he said to himself, an hour later, pacing his room with rapid strides. "If I can but get the image, and its power is not lost, I can learn much from it," he muttered, "but how to get it? Yes, I will have to do it."

He drew the portrait from his pocket, and succeeded in removing the frame from the miniature. Then he gazed long and earnestly at the beautiful face before him. What a superlatively sweet face it was, and how was it possible for him to assist the original. Though Adrian did not remember a single thing of what had occurred during his trance state, he still thought of the Countess as his beloved mother whose body he had hoped to again see in the catacombs, when the priest so suddenly entrapped him before leading him to it—for Adrian thought the bodies formerly in the chateau were buried in the catacombs.

With the beautiful gold frame in his hand, Adrian sought a jeweler in the Rue St. Honore, whom he had dealings with some years before, and offered it

for sale. The jeweler examined it carefully, and commented upon its rich beauty, asking :

“What do you want for it, M. Courcey?”

Adrian scarcely expected recognition, and he preferred to remain incognito, but he was known, and regrets were useless, so he replied :

“As much as you will allow, with the privilege, if possible, of redeeming it within a week.”

“The diamonds are valuable for their purity, though not large, and the other gems are of fine quality, while the gold is heavy,” said the jeweler, critically. “I would be willing to advance two thousand francs upon it, and at the end of a week you can have it for fifty francs advance.”

Adrian gratefully accepted the offer as it was more than he expected to realize from the frame, for he was not a good judge of gems. He returned joyfully to his lodgings in the Rue Lacepede, resolving to secure Tuua the next day, and then he might be able to at least solve some of the mysteries that surrounded him.

He gained his room, and sat for several hours trying vainly to decipher what had happened to him since taking that wonderful drop, but in vain. Not the slightest thing could he recall.

What had become of Karnac? Of the other serpents? Of the portrait of Jannes? Of the vast library of mystical lore? And how had he alone returned?

Who brought him to that dusky chapel, side by side with the queer priest who spoke and acted so strangely toward him?

Where was Philip, with whom he had so boldly taken the peculiar essence? And where were all the

wonderful shades that had appeared to him in the chateau?

Who was Vera, the Priestess? How was she connected with his life? Everything seemed enveloped in darkness to him, and he pondered deeply over his strange position until night cast her shadows over the city, and one more day had stepped into the past.

With gloomy thoughts Adrian strolled into the well-nigh deserted streets, for the spirit of the guillotine and death reigned over Paris, and at nightfall its citizens, especially of the respectable class, kept within doors.

Adrian slowly walked toward the church of St. Etienne du Mont, for here, during a part of his life, he had attended worship, and listened to Minotti's kindly voice. Entering the church, he advanced to the altar, and kneeling before it in the darkness, with but a single taper lighting the scene, he saw the bowed head, the grey hair, the priestly robe, and the familiar figure of Minotti. Minotti—whom he had left in the secret vault of the catacombs, the night before, in his trance slumber. Minotti—his foster father and his friend—and with a cry of heartfelt joy, Adrian sprang to his side, and knelt beside him, encircling the priest in his arms.

"Father Minotti! Father Minotti! Thank God! We meet again on Earth!"

"Adrian! My son! My son! My prayer is answered at last. The living God rules supreme in my heart, and you have returned. Let us give thanks to Him who rules all that is worth ruling in man," and together they offered a deep and fervent prayer of thanks.

Arising, Minotti grasped Adrian's hands between

his own, and looking him full in the eyes, said, in deep rich tones, with an inflection in them that Adrian had never heard before:

"And now, my son, tell me what you found in all these years since we parted in the Chateau Balzac?"

"I know not," was the strangely sad reply.

"And you remember absolutely nothing of what befell you?"

"Absolutely nothing."

"The flight of the spirit is mercifully veiled from humanity," returned Minotti, "but where is Philip?"

"I do not know. I cannot remember seeing him since we partook of that golden hued essence in the chateau. But his body is in the catacombs. I was told so by a priest."

"And the other bodies, where are they?"

"Also in the catacombs, the priest said, though where I do not know."

"And this priest?"

"Is dead."

"What was his name?"

"He called himself Le Blanc."

"Le Blanc, of St. Sulpice?"

"Yes, he mentioned St. Sulpice."

"A queer man, always interested in occult subjects, yet ever trying to conceal his interest, and prevent others from following his course."

"But he was a fanatic when unmasked, and belonged to at least one secret order of mystics—the Sons of Isis."

"The Sons of Isis! Was Le Blanc a member of that order?" ejaculated Minotti.

"Yes, and what can you tell me of them?" asked Adrian, with breathless interest.

"This much, that it was through their influence the Count and Countess Balzac made over all their vast property to one of the order, before their last experiment, and left you with but a trifle of a large estate."

"But who received it? What man?" quickly asked Adrian.

"It was willed to and received by a man, whom the estate was apparently indebted to, and who, under the will, was to receive the property, not only of the Count, but that of the Countess also, in case they both died. The Count apparently died, and so did his wife, and you alone were left. Of the details I knew nothing until years afterward, and thought as did the rest, that the Count had made away with his fortune in some way by mismanagement, although unlike the others, I knew that he did not poison his wife, and kill himself, in consequence of his losses. This was the story spread abroad at the time, and believed by all who heard it so far as I know."

"Then you do not know who really received the property?"

"Yes, the most of it went to a certain so-called Count Jaroslav, at that time claiming to be a Russian count of large fortune and great travel. He undoubtedly was a learned traveler, for he spoke many languages, and I have since learned that he had lived in many countries, always passing for a man of wealth and rank."

"Would you know him if you saw him?"

"No. I never have, to my knowledge, seen him. But why do you ask this question?"

"I thought perhaps his body rested beside yours in the vault of the catacombs. But how did you escape from there?" Adrian added, feeling that he should have asked this question before.

"A queer thing happened," said Minotti. "I awoke to find myself in an open coffin, surrounded by a number of vagabonds, who were earnestly surveying me. They appeared to be holding a sort of mock ceremony over me, for I listened awhile to their jargon before moving, as I seemed to gradually come back to myself by slow degrees."

"'I have seen Mesmer do it,' said one, standing at the foot of the coffin.

"'Bah, you're a fool,' said another, and a third added:

"'Stick a knife into him, and see if he will awake.'

"Then I opened my eyes and saw that they were standing around my coffin with clasped fingers, while two others were laughing and holding my hands. But when I gazed upon them, they gave a howl of terror, and sank upon their knees, while I arose and spoke to them, which terrified them still more, and some ran away yelling like devils. But presently when they saw that I was not a ghost, their courage returned, and they came back and talked with me.

"One whom they called the Gendarme, said he had been promised a reward for a return to the vault, by a man whose life he had saved, and that finding me there, out of sport they held a mimic ceremony over me, after the manner of Mesmer, and that now he would lead me into the upper world, provided I would promise him a hundred francs, to be paid within a week, as I had no money with me.

I agreed, and asked to be taken to St. Etienne du Mont, and arrived nere about an hour since. This is the story."

"And a curious enough one it is," said Adrian, "but did you see anything of a strange man beside you?"

"An empty coffin lay there, and the dead body of a priest was lying by the door. That was all."

"And the vagabonds said nothing of any other body?"

"Nothing."

"And of course you do not know where to find the bodies of Philip and the others," said Adrian anxiously.

"I do not," and Minotti then told Adrian all about the sacking of the chateau. Of his long watch for their return. Of how finally, in despair, he had taken the remaining drops of the essence, and then it was all a blank.

He said that further concealment of the bodies, after the mob had taken full possession of the chateau, was impossible, and that he had finally reached the conclusion that the essence had proven a poison, and had killed life in the bodies but preserved the flesh. So he had resolved to take it, and had made preparation to do so before the mob attacked the chateau, having the coffins ready for all the bodies when the time came to take the drop.

"But did you not remember that we revived your body after you had taken the essence?" asked Adrian.

"It was never certain that I took it," was the reply. "I had about convinced myself that it was the influence about the tomb that had overpowered

me, and not this peculiar fluid." Minotti hesitated a moment as if he had more to tell but dared not.

"Tell me all," said Adrian, "for I see that you are holding something back, for fear of paining me."

"Well, the bodies of the Count and the Countess were missing from the sarcophagus the day before the mob arrived, and it was this fact which fully determined me upon taking the drop, and following you."

"Missing!" and Adrian bowed his head and thought deeply. "Then whose were the bodies taken from the chateau?" and he pondered over this question silently, while Minotti, also, shook his head, and replied:

"The sarcophagus was empty when I saw it last. How long had it been so, I do not know, for I had kept away from the tomb in fear of the influence since you left, until the day before the chateau was sacked."

"Well, let us go to my room, and then to-morrow, when we get the image, we will see further about the Sons of Isis," said Adrian, and they left the church together, walking to Adrian's abode.

"When did you first learn of this secret order?" asked Adrian as they entered his quarters.

"I first heard of the Sons of Isis through the confession of one of the higher members of the order, and his story was so strange that I thought him laboring under a death-bed delusion, for he was dying. But he mentioned Count Balzac's case among others, and upon further investigation I confirmed his statement with evidence which was to me conclusive that he told the truth.

“He stated that the order of the Sons of Isis was as old as ancient Egypt, and had originated among the learned priests of the time for the development of occult science to its highest point, who handed it down from generation to generation secretly and orally, in order that it might not become common property, but belong to the few, who were bound by fearful oaths to use such power as it gave them only for the good of the world and their faith.

“The order consisted of four circles, or degrees, the first degree containing but one man, who was the Hierophant of the order, and upon whose brow was imprinted the Sacred Uraeus, as he alone possessed full power.

“Next came the leaders below him, who possessed knowledge and were capable of using it, and they were marked with the figure of the Veiled Isis over the heart, indicating that their hearts were true to the order.

“Then followed those who were initiates, possessing qualities which made them unconscious tools in the hands of the leaders, and they were marked with the Veiled Sphinx over the muscle of the right arm, to denote that their powers were used for the order, and that they were silent as the Sphinx.

“The fourth and lowest circle consisted of men whose strength was needed, but whose other qualities were so objectionable that they could not even be initiates. They were subdued by magnetism and marked with a Veiled Sphinx over the muscle of the right arm, as were the others, save that here the Sphinx was bridled, indicating that though silent, they could not be trusted without bridling.

“The men of this circle never knew that they were

tools. They knew nothing of the order unless they learned of it by accident, as they were only used in an unconscious state. They remembered nothing of their acts when released from a magnetized condition, it being so willed by the leader using them.

"The strangest part of this society was that none of the leaders held any direct communication with the chief Hierophant. They received his commands through a Priestess, who remained in a trance state continually, under the sole control of this ruler, no matter where either he or she might be.

"She was never released from this condition until death claimed her, but her life was filled with pleasure, for the leader threw over her the most beautiful dreams that his imagination could picture, and to her they were a reality. She lived in an enchanted dreamland while a Priestess of the Sons of Isis.

"Another strange thing was that the initiates, or the more enlightened tools, were never informed who were the leaders. They never saw them, unless by accident, or because they were thought worthy to soon become leaders themselves. They were not usually aware of the distinguishing mark of a leader.

"Thus the secret society was kept inviolate, and its acts being performed by unconscious tools in a magnetized state, could never be traced to the higher powers above, and if by mischance, some tool or initiate lost his life or liberty through his acts, he alone suffered for it.

"For long years the society flourished, and it is claimed that Moses was a member of it, as likewise were the magicians, Jannes and Jambres, who opposed him before Pharaoh. Zoroaster, the Persian,

was one of its members, and the wise men of the East, who followed the star of Bethlehem, gained their knowledge through it. King Solomon was one of its most learned leaders, and through its secrets constructed his famous ring, which drove away all evil Earth spirits, and also Solomon's Seal, which protected all true adepts from such shades.

"Emperors of Rome, Pharaohs of Egypt, philosophers of Athens and the world, were at various generations admitted to its ranks, until finally it spread over all the known countries in its secret ramifications, and in the dark ages thousands of the unfortunate tools were burnt at the stake, or suffered through the inquisitions, for witchcraft and other crimes against the laws. Some are suffering to-day through their connection with it.

"The order fell from its high original aim, and became in many places simply a power for evil, the leaders using it for purposes far different from what it was originally intended. As they grew in evil, so they lost in the highest knowledge, until much of the secret lore became extinct, and true adeptship was rare.

"The dying member claimed that the most wonderful things were originally performed by the leaders. That huge pyramids were built under their supervision, and monuments cut from a single block and reared on high with ease, which puzzle the best engineers of the world to-day, thousands of years later, to account for their erection.

"In those days he said that the learned leaders had power over inanimate, as well as over animate objects, and that when Moses stood by the Red Sea, and the waters rolled back—when he smote the rock

at Meribah, and water flowed from it—it proved the mighty power, gained from the highest source of all power, as also did many other Biblical wonders spoken of. But these powers were all taken away because of the base uses they were put to by unscrupulous men.

“ There still exist remnants of this secret order to-day, he said, though yearly growing less and less, and here he mentioned Count Balzac’s name, at which I immediately became inwardly excited, and carefully noted his words.

“ He claimed that Count Balzac had been a member of the order, and was a powerful adept or leader. That his wife, the beautiful Countess, was one of the rarest specimens of the highest order of impressibles, and that her spirit could be sent forth at will whenever the Count wished, even to other worlds, and returning, inform him through her entranced lips what she had seen or heard there.

“ He said that to rise above this Earth required the very highest type of purity in thought and action, but that many could, in an entranced state, visit Earthly places at the will of the adept.

“ He stated that the Count had accepted the friendship of some of the most dangerous men in the order, adventurers and charlatans, who used their power for ill. That at their instigation he had turned his own and his wife’s fortune into one of their leader’s hands, through an acknowledgment of debt never owing, under repeated promises that the whole of it should be used in building a temple in Alexandria, and restoring to the Sons of Isis a glorious receptacle for their Priestess in this ancient city, where, like the Oracle of Delphi, she could be consulted by

all. Here they would rebuild a mystical faith, bring purity to a fallen secret order, and generally benefit mankind through restored knowledge.

“‘But why did not the Countess when entranced warn him of these plotters?’ I asked.

“‘Because she was under their control more than his own in these states. Their combined power at all times overthrew his, and unwittingly she herself became their instrument by reflecting their will and pretended grand beliefs and intentions, when she entered this state,’ he replied.

“Then this dying man told me how these charlatans worked upon the Count’s mind, and induced him to make the final experiment and take the Countess with him. He told me how both had been in a trance state for several years, and that probably their spirits would never return, if the power of those dangerous adepts could prevent it.”

“And was this all?” asked Adrian, as Minotti ceased speaking.

“About all that I dare to tell you, for the rest mainly concerns other cases,” was the reply.

“And did this man, this member of the order, die?”

“I learned that he did, but ere he died he showed me his secret imprint over the heart, and said that he wished absolution, as he was one of those who had used his power for ill, not only over Count Balzac, but others.”

“What was his name?” asked Adrian, quietly.

“That is bound to secrecy by the veil of the confessional, and cannot be told. For the rest he voluntarily asked me to use his confession to assist in righting the wrong done to the Balzacs.”

"And how can it be righted? Did he give no further clew?"

"He said that if I could master the secrets of the order, and become a true adept, that the power thus granted would enable me to do justice to you, for by this time I had told him your story and my interest in you," answered Minotti sadly.

"And did you try it?" was Adrian's astonished reply.

"Yes, but failed. I studied carefully and long, but it was useless. I was unable to grasp the power, and never learned the secrets of the order, though I lost my peace of mind in the attempt," said Minotti, slowly and sorrowfully. "For years afterward I never knew content."

They both were silent for some little time after this, pondering deeply, when Adrian resumed the conversation, and told Minotti about finding the portrait upon the strange man's body. Of the cabalistic characters upon the frame, and of his disposal of it. The finding of Tuua, and what had occurred since he remembered meeting Le Blanc in the chapel. Minotti listened carefully and attentively, and when Adrian showed him the paper, with its address and peculiar characters, he shook his head in puzzled wonder, and could offer no explanation of the strange mystery.

"To-morrow we will see Tuua," said Adrian at last, and they retired for the night, and slept till late the following morning.

CHAPTER XIII.

I AM ADRIAN! WHERE IS SHE?

"Faubourg St. Germaine. Pyramid 4. Amenophis."

Evidently an address and a password, thought both Minotti and Adrian, in examining it the next day. But to what? That was the question. And it remained to be solved.

The day advanced, and the hour was at hand to see Antoine and get the image. Adrian, accompanied by Minotti, saw the locksmith, paid the amount, and soon Tuua was at the room in the Rue Lacedede.

Standing before it, Adrian earnestly questioned the image:

"Tuua, if indeed my spirit is in harmony with you, speak. Where is Philip?"

"He is here," replied the veiled image, "and he has much to tell you."

"And will he tell it now, through you?" said Adrian, joyfully.

"To-night he will tell you," answered the image. "Question him not until this day is past."

"Where are the bodies of the Count and the Countess Balzac?" asked Adrian eagerly.

"You will see both ere long. Your strange search is well nigh over."

"And are the earthly shells they left behind again inhabited?"

"The materiality which they cast aside is again animated," was the guarded reply.

"Thank God!" was the glad cry of Adrian and Minotti.

"Mortals should thank God when those they love are freed from Earthly fetters—not when they are trammelled with its clay," replied Tuua.

The two friends pondered deeply over this reply for some moments, and then Adrian slowly said:

"And are they unhappy since their return to Earth?"

"Search this planet and find the perfectly happy, then ask if those who return could be more content, and thank God that the future is veiled mercifully from humanity," was the reply, still ambiguous.

"But are their spirits not content," persisted Adrian.

"You shall see them, and then judge. The veil is cast over them, and I am not permitted to lift it. Wait but a little while and rest content."

"And the Sons of Isis—what of them?"

"The fallen Sons of Isis soon will meet their doom. The glorious Sons of Isis shall arise again. To-morrow one shall fall who has usurped the regal place that many ancient Pharaohs have filled. In the dust he has dragged it. In the dust he will be dragged. His crimes are legion—his virtues few."

"To-morrow! And will his death right the wrongs of the Balzacs?" asked Minotti.

"The wrongs of this Earth are seldom righted here. In part his death will right some of those ills for which he was responsible, and others he will expiate through future ages in other lives of woe, suf-

fering in each as he has forced others to suffer here in this existence."

"And his name?"

"His name is blotted out already from the Book of Life. The mantle of Death encircles him as I speak. The shadows which have gathered round for full three centuries claim him for their own at last, and as he faces Death, his ministers in other lands prepare to meet him on the border. He wills it, and they obey the silent call of the dying Hierophant.

"The Sacred Uraeus encircles his livid brow like a wrathful demon of living fire, eating its way to his agonized brain, in a sure vengeance long delayed but now at hand. To-morrow, at the stroke of twelve, he perishes in the dark cave temple in the Isle of Elephanta. With him fall the foulest of his leaders, and each country will to-morrow at that hour record the death of one who, known or unknown, bears upon his breast the secret symbol, and has abused its power. If you would see a leader die, and one whose death unfolds a mystery that surrounds you, follow him who leads the crowd to the guillotine ere twelve o'clock to-morrow, present to him the cabalistic paper found upon his body in the vault, and take what he will give. Farewell!" and the voice ceased.

"To-morrow, then, the mystery will be cleared. To-night Philip answers to my questioning. The threads are drawing closer toward the end," said Adrian slowly, oppressed by indefinable sadness in spite of himself.

"Let us walk about the city for a little while," said Minotti, "but disguise yourself as I will, and

then we shall not be recognized by old acquaintances. To-day, on our way to the locksmith, I met those whom I knew, and had they not been alarmed by weightier things I should have been discovered."

Adrian secured disguises for both, and he appeared the priest, while Minotti seemed the citizen. So great a change the dress made, that they sallied forth without fear of recognition.

The afternoon was chill and bleak, and the January sun was obscured by wintry clouds, but as they passed familiar scenes, their hearts grew lighter, and their spirits rose in spite of the cheerless day, for to-morrow they would learn what they had so long waited for. To-morrow the problem would be solved, and then they would be reunited to those whose lives had been so strangely interwoven with mystery.

Everywhere the city was lined with troops, for a vast army was being raised to defend Paris from the wrath of those who had sworn to avenge the death of King Louis XVI., and as they passed, Adrian and Minotti learned the condition of France and Paris.

Together they walked past the excited crowds of people, and listened to the stirring events of the times as though they belonged to another century, for their private affairs drove other thoughts out of their minds at present.

On they went, past Notre Dame, and then toward the prison of the Conciergerie, led by that indefinable impulse which occasionally leads humanity. It was here, in its silent cells, that nearly three hundred prisoners had been massacred a few short months before. It was here that many of the political prisoners were then confined. In its dungeons

Marie Antoinette and Robespierre were later to array themselves for death.

Built originally as a regal palace for the Kings of France, the Palais de Justice, and the Conciergerie were now the prison and the guard. As they looked upon it with feelings of mingled awe and distrust, a paper fluttered toward them and fell at their feet. Picking it up Adrian saw these words written in a bold, free hand:

"As a priest of the church, Father Minotti is asked to receive the confession of one who dies within two hours. Inquire at the Conciergerie for the Abbé Renaud, before it is too late."

"There is no time to be lost. Quick, let us hasten back, and you can don your priestly robes and return at once," said Adrian eagerly.

"Too late for that. The hours for visitors to the condemned will close ere we can return. You, Adrian, take my place, and if it concerns this mystery, listen to what he says with calmness, as Minotti. If it concerns other things, then tell the unfortunate that I could not reach him, but sent you in my stead."

A few moments later Adrian was ushered into one of the cells of the Conciergerie. It was a dismal dungeon, situated next to the Seine, whose waters oozed through the solid stone in places, and left patches of green, slimy moss upon its sides. The booming of the wagons on the quay above, the splash of the river, and the footsteps of the passing crowd sounded hollowly and solemn in this subterranean dungeon, and but the faint light of a tallow candle lit the cell, and cast its fitful shadows over the spot. Upon a pallet in a corner lay the figure of

a man, with his face masked in black, moaning in pain and agony.

"It is you—at last—Minotti?" said the man, between his gasps for breath.

Adrian, who had drawn his cowl over his face, bowed in silence.

"I have much—to confess—and but—a short time—to do it in," he gasped.

Then Adrian noticed that the figure was not that of the stranger in the vault, and that it was also clad in priestly garments. He was about to make a correction and explain his presence, as this was evidently not the stranger he expected to see, when the next words shut his lips. Slowly and painfully the man spoke :

"You remember—the Count—Jules Balzac—and your charge—given now some—some twenty-six—years ago?"

Adrian hesitated a moment, then bowed and said :

"I remember."

"You remember the—the Countess—Lena Balzac—and—and her charge?"

"I remember," came in low tones from the priestly figure.

"You remember the—the confession—made to—you by—by the Baron—Rudolfsberg—the dying—Son of Isis—years ago?"

The priestly figure did not move, but the abbé failed to notice it, and continued :

"What did you—do with—with the—bodies left—left in—your care?"

"They were guarded till they disappeared," was the faint reply.

"And—the boy—the young—Count—he is—still with—with you?"

"Adrian is still with Minotti," was the low answer.

"Then it—is not—yet too late—not too—late," and the abbé relapsed into silence for a few moments, gasping heavily in the murky atmosphere for breath, and partaking sparingly of a dark looking mixture from a vial that he held.

"Count Balzac did not tell you all that night he disappeared," said the man, gaining strength and speaking rapidly, "and neither was he, as you have been informed, the innocent victim of a mystic conspiracy, though the Countess led you to infer so, under his influence, and you have since been told this was the case by Rudolfsberg. He had a friend—named Count Jaroslav, also—a mystic, who possessed a daughter—Vera, about fourteen years—of age, beautiful and—very impressible.

"The two mystics agreed—that they would partake—of the essence which produces coma at the same hour, and that Lena Balzac and Vera Jaroslav—should do the same, and then—six months later, after they had explored—the wonders of nature, Count Balzac—should, if possible, enter Count Jaroslav's entranced body. Lena Balzac should enter—Vera's entranced body. They should—awake in that state, and the—spirits of Jaroslav and Vera should—do the same with—the bodies of the Count and—the Countess Balzac.

"The experiment was not—successful for most—of those concerned. Lena Balzac's spirit—fled into space immediately—and never returned. The others tried—to follow her, and—were lost for—some time—in the mysteries—of the Universe—separating there, and—none of them—meeting—again for—years."

Here the masked man was again attacked with painful weakness, and drew his breath in short, agonizing gasps. He again partook of the dark mixture, a larger quantity, and Adrian waited patiently till the paroxysm passed, and the sufferer resumed, his voice growing clearer and stronger, in proportion to the dose he had taken :

“ Finally, Count Balzac escaped from the darkness, into which the pursuit of the Countess had led him, and returned to Earth. He succeeded in entering the entranced body of Jaroslav, which, with his daughter’s body, rested in a similar tomb to Balzac’s, located on Jaroslav’s Russian estates.

“ Balzac then found that in France he was considered not only dead, but dishonored, and a murderer. That he could not re-enter his own body without bringing the Countess with him, for fear of a judicial trial. He also found that his estates and those of his wife, which had been willed to Jaroslav under their mutual agreement (Jaroslav having also willed his property to Balzac, so that in case either returned without the other their mutual interests could be protected by the one returning) were so fixed, that as Jaroslav he could get the property, as his people expected Jaroslav’s return. That as Count Balzac he could get nothing, his return being unexpected. This decided him to remain as Count Jaroslav, whose serfs were daily looking for his appearance, as he had instructed them to carefully tend his body, and he would surely come back and awaken from slumber.

“ Thus everything seemed fitted for him to continue as Jaroslav, and his risks were great to assume that he was Balzac. He remained Count Jaroslav, and set to work endeavoring to bring back the

others who had tried the experiment with him. He secured the Balzac estates, and then, by his adeptship, assumed to be a dying man—the Baron Rudolfsberg—and sent for you, Minotti, to confess him. He told you many things that were true, but in order to secure you as a student of occult science, and gain your assistance in bringing the others back, he told you of a conspiracy against the Balzacs which did not exist, thinking and hoping that this would enlist your sympathies, and that you would become a true adept and assist him.

“Well, you tried to do so, but could not, even with his unseen help, prevail against the influences which surrounded the chateau—for his occult studies in Black Magic had called many Earth-Born shadows about his dwelling and himself. You he expected would be a purely true adept of the highest order, not a mixed one like himself, and being perfectly pure yourself, you could recall the pure spirits which had fled. You failed, and instead of controlling the Earth-Born shadows, they—controlled—you. They—mesmerized—you, instead—of your—mesmerizing—them.”

Here the masked abbé was again obliged to rest in the confession, for another attack had seized him. In a few moments, by the aid of his restorative, he resumed :

“And now, the struggle which has always been on Earth between the God-born and the Earth-Born influence, between the true spirit and the Earthly soul which surrounds it, began in Count Balzac’s case, as in many others, to turn in favor of the Earthly, darker shadows. Gradually, little by little, his nature, originally true and honorable, began to suc-

cumb to the shadows his sorcery had evoked to assist him. In a few years they had obtained complete possession of him, and people wondered at the change in Jaroslav, who had by this time become in reality a fallen Son of Isis, and a dangerous man. His neighbors feared him, many strange crimes were committed, and a number of innocent tools were sent to Siberia, at his instigation.

"He constantly feared that the true Jaroslav would return, or that you and others would discover through some means the deception he was practicing—for now he was as anxious that the spirits of those who had made the test with him should remain away, as before he had been that they should return. He determined never to yield his position to the true Jaroslav, should he come back.

"Vera escaped from the wanderings she had been led into, after some seventeen years' absence, and returned, entering her body, which appeared as young and beautiful as it had been upon the night of the experiment. But Jaroslav threw her into a trance state, and kept her so, using her to unconsciously assist him in his schemes, for she was a superlative impressible, and would wander at his will through space. He brought her to Paris, and established a secret branch of the order, with himself as the Ruler, and Vera as the Priestess. Though professedly she was controlled solely by the wearer of the Uraeus, she in reality was controlled only by Jaroslav. He took her to St. Petersburg, to London, and the same procedure was adopted.

"At this time Adrian appeared upon the scene, his son; a young man, full of the fire of youth, and with his father's mystic nature and inherent power.

You, Minotti, told him the secret of his birth, set his brain on fire, and he determined upon a search for those who had fled.

“Jaroslav thought to frighten him from the project, and with all his now terrible power over the black shadows, he concentrated them at the chateau, and they appeared to Adrian. But he was not to be frightened. Jaroslav knew all his doings, through Vera, whose spirit hovered over Adrian often in his work, and returning told the master.

“He could have killed Adrian at any time desired, through others, through you, Minotti, had he wished, but he was proud of his courageous son, and knowing that sooner or later he could circumvent him, let him go on. The day arrived. Philip and Adrian took the coma drop and started. Jaroslav knew the moment, and immediately sent Vera after them, with instructions to finally lead Adrian and Philip into the black darkness that had engulfed himself, Vera, and the true Jaroslav years before. She did so, at his bidding, uttering words which he put into her mouth. But he was unable to recall her, and she was lost to him forever. None but the truest adept gifted with the highest power, could recall that pure spirit from the negative Circle of Silence.

“Adrian and Philip were lost—but so was his Priestess, and for many weeks he tried to find another. It was useless. Then he decided to remove the bodies of Count Balzac and the Countess, for as he could no longer tell by an impressible what might happen to them, he still feared that the true Jaroslav might return, and being unable to enter his own body, take that of Count Balzac, and by true adeptship overthrow him—for now his power was waning.

"So the two bodies were removed through the catacombs to his house in the Faubourg St. Germaine, and there he used as he deemed best, either the body of Jaroslav, or that of Balzac, meantime, in order to be rid of it, depositing the body of Vera in the sarcophagus of the chateau.

"He had tools among the priests, and when he learned that the chateau near Versailles had been sacked, and that Minotti had taken the coma drop—for he knew that he had not killed himself—and also that the bodies were to be removed, he entered the tomb, and placed himself beside Vera. Jaroslav was a strong Royalist, and was proscribed by the Revolutionists, and his life was in imminent danger at that time. So Jaroslav's body was carried with the others into the catacombs, it being placed beside you, Minotti, the others being buried elsewhere, at the suggestion of an abbé who assisted in the work.

"He then used Balzac's body only, telling his people that Jaroslav was in such danger of his life, that he had gone upon a long journey. The rest you know, and to-day, he, as Jaroslav, returns from his journey, but now the Abbé—Renaud dies—ere the—guillotine can sever—his head—from his—body. His—power—has well—nigh—vanished."

"And what of her—the Countess?" asked Adrian, rising and bending over the prostrate abbé, who was laboring desperately for breath. Adrian quickly raised the vial to his lips, and for a moment it revived him.

"The Countess—he tried to—recall—as his—Priestess in—Vera's place. Her—portrait—set—Lemurian—Sorcerer's prayer. Body—throne—Priestess—Ah-h-h-h-h-h-h—D-y-i-n-g!=dy"—

"Look at me! I am Adrian! Where is she?" shrieked the listener, raising his cowl, and looking straight into those dying eyes as if to stop the spirit in its flight.

"A-A-A-Adrian!"— and the abbé lay still and speechless upon the pallet.

Adrian thought him dead. But the dying abbé made a last final effort, and amid his moans whispered, while Adrian bent closely over his purple, parched lips, and looked into his death-glazed eyes:

"T-o—m-o-r—r-o-w—g-u-i-l—l-o"—the death rattle gurgled, his hands fell nervously beside him, the black mask shuddered a second, and then all was silence.

"Dead!" said Adrian slowly.

Then he carefully lifted the black mask, and started back in horror!

The face was that of Count Jules Balzac!

* * * * *

"Another Royalist abbé cheats the guillotine," remarked the concierge some hours later, as he stood beside the pallet.

"The air here is not good for Royalists."

CHAPTER XIV.

"IN COMING CENTURIES WE MAY MEET AGAIN."

Again Adrian and Minotti stood before the veiled figure of Isis. Night had fallen over the city, and the deep toned bells of Notre Dame announced the midnight hour.

The strange story of the Abbé Renaud had been committed to paper, and lay beside them on the table. The lamplight flitted fantastically over the room, and cast their shadows fitfully over the marvellous image, standing before them like a dethroned oracle of the olden days.

"Tuaa, is the hour at hand, and Philip here?" questioned Adrian, with throbbing heart and sad demeanor.

"The hour and Philip are at hand. Write, while he dictates through me that which Minotti and yourself should know—the strange, weird story of your voyage into space."

For hours Adrian sat and wrote, and finally he finished. The marvellous story lay before them, and the identity of his beautiful mother with Eve was now complete. But, alas! He greatly feared that never would he fold her to his heart in this life, and that she would be but a beautiful shadow, a lovely dream, too pure and fair, too far encompassed by Lilith's power, to return to him on Earth.

Sadly he questioned Tuaa:

"O! Tuaa, will she not return?"

The veiled figure made reply :

"Search well thy heart, and if its truest love would dictate her return, then pray to that power which alone can grant your prayer."

"Not Terrasal?"

"No. A far higher, nobler power than any Earth-born spirit. Call him Zeus, Jove, Jehovah, or the Nameless One—the God of All. That power alone can help. But ere you call, search well thy heart for grain of selfishness, since prayers for self are answered not."

Adrian bowed his head upon his hands. Minotti clasped his arms about the silent, sorrowful figure.

"To-morrow night thy search for Eve shall end. Others will claim allegiance from thy heart. The dawn of another day will usher in a new life and a fresh existence. Arouse thyself to meet it." The veiled image spoke solemnly and low.

"What shall be done?" sadly and slowly answered Adrian.

"At break of day, ere Paris is awake, the bodies of those who sleep so dreamlessly in the catacombs must be removed," said the image.

"Where are they in those dark and silent galleries? To where shall they be taken?"

"Under the crucifix they rest, beneath the chateau in the Faubourg St. Germaine. You will know it when you reach the spot. Take them to the chateau through the secret entrance near their resting place. Follow Philip, who will lead you aright. Farewell!"

* * * * *

The day was breaking as the two friends reached the church of St. Etienne du Mont, and entered the

catacombs from its secret stairway, guided by a sure impression that they were right. With lanterns casting long fantastic shadows in their rear, they travelled onward, ever following the impulse. At last they stood beside the pile of stones, surmounted by the crucifix, in that lonely, rock-hewn chamber.

Swiftly they worked, and soon their efforts were rewarded. The first empty coffin lay before them on the rocky floor. Then Philip's deformed body was carefully lifted from its resting place, and at last the beautiful sleeper, Vera, lay in sweet repose, pure and peaceful, before their gaze.

Adrian started at sight of her. What was this fleeting, sweet memory, which mistily came to him as he gazed upon that charming face.

Tenderly they lifted her beautiful figure from its resting place, and Adrian, clasping her in his arms, led the way while Minotti followed with Philip. A few steps brought them to a diverging gallery, and following it, they soon arrived at the secret entrance to the chateau. Mounting the short flight of rocky stairs, they entered an elegant apartment, and laid the inanimate figures upon divans, richly upholstered, as was all the furniture, and then, seating themselves, they rested from their labors, for they had not slept during the night just past, and they were very weary. This was the place they sought, evidently, yet the house was deserted.

Overcome by drowsiness they closed their eyes, and sleep fell upon them. As they slumbered, through the open doorway came a powerful python, and drooped its head in submission at the feet of Adrian, closing its eyes as if in sleep. They slept

for some time, when finally Adrian opened his eyes, and dreamily saw the serpent.

"Karnac, Karnac," he softly whispered, and the python reared its head in obedience to the call, and looked at him.

"Awake! Minotti! Awake!" cried Adrian, suddenly remembering the day, and the hour they were to be at the guillotine.

Minotti quickly arose, and together they found the exit to the chamber, and passed through the house. Not a person was visible, and a deathlike stillness reigned over the place. Karnac had followed them, but Adrian willed him to return and watch over the two bodies, and at the wish, he quickly turned and glided toward the chamber they had left.

Over the gate leading from the grounds into the faubourg, they noticed a small pyramid, but without stopping, the two friends hurried toward the Place de la Revolution, whither the crowd were going, for to-day a number of prisoners were to be executed to appease the growing appetite of the mob for blood. They were none too early, and as they hurried along, jostled here and there by the savage crowd or the armed soldiery, they reached the Rue Royale, and the death carts came in sight.

Standing within the first, his powerful frame towering above the others, for there were four prisoners in the cart with him, they saw the strong features of the man they sought. Daring, courageous, but cruel he looked. Still defiant, still a master.

"*Vive le Roi!*"

He defiantly shouted this challenge in the teeth of the crowd, who in return surged madly about the cart, with angry screams of:

"Vive la Republique!"

"A mort le Royaliste!"

"La Guillotine! La Guillotine!"

It was with difficulty the gendarmes kept the infuriated crowd at bay, as this powerful figure hurled defiance at them. He appeared anxious to attract attention, and every few moments his flashing eyes would roam over the excited rabble as if in search of some one.

Seeing this, Adrian and Minotti pressed forward in the crush, and were soon within his gaze. His eyes lighted with a joyous expression, his lips sternly set themselves together for a moment, and then he turned to one of the gendarmes—it was Cabot—and looked steadily at him, never noting the howling mob.

"Death to the Royalist!" shouted the rabble.

He heeded it not for the moment, and still fastened his black, flashing eyes upon the man.

Suddenly his face kindled as the gendarme sprang at the horses' heads, and turning them rapidly, the cart careened, upset, and all was confusion.

At that second, with a powerful leap the prisoner sprang to Minotti's side, and handed him a packet so quickly that the crowd had not time to notice him in the confusion of the moment.

"Where is the paper? Quick!" he whispered, and the next instant it was in his hand.

"Vive le Roi!" he bravely cried.

"The mob gathered about him in fury, and attempted to break through the cordon of guards, who were now quickly driving the rabble back from the cart, while others righted it.

The prisoners again mounted their conveyance of

death, and once more the tall, commanding figure towered above his fellows. But, folding his arms in haughty silence, he no longer noticed the jeers of the crowd, or the fierce epithets bestowed upon him. His thoughts were far away, and his dark eyes looked into the dull and wintry sky, as though to pierce the depths which lay beyond.

The jostling cart rolled onward. The seething mob howled and hooted in vain. He did not deign to answer them, and wildly they waved their red bonnets, their pikes and staves at him to attract attention. His dark eyes still looked toward the bleak and wintry clouds, as though seeking for some sign of hope.

The guillotine was reached, and one by one his fellow prisoners descended from the cart, but yet he stood gazing into space with flashing eyes and expectant look. The guard roughly ordered him to descend and make way for the rest. Slowly he gazed about him, and stepped from the conveyance to the ground below.

One by one the other carts arrived, and the condemned prisoners were formed in line for the last tragedy. But the dark eyes still scanned the bleak horizon and the dun, misty clouds. The death line moved forward, and now the first head has fallen into the basket. The delighted crowd howled and shrieked in demoniac joy as the knife descended, but no tremor shook the frame of the expectant watcher.

Now his turn has come, and mounting the red steps of Death which led to the gleaming axe, no longer flashing, but wet with the gore of those who preceded him, he stood beside the executioners, and

gave one searching look into the clouds—then smiled defiantly.

Raising the paper he had received on high, he muttered a strange prayer in an unknown tongue, tore the paper to shreds, and fell into the arms of the executioners, who at that instant had seized him, and were ready to bind him to the bloody plank.

“He is dead,” said one of them.

The bells of the city deep and dismally tolled the hour of twelve.

“It matters little, save that his blood won’t flow so easily, and there will be less to clean up,” was the brutal reply, as the body was bound to the slippery plank, and placed in position under the knife.

The gory axe fell—the head rolled into the basket—the blood-thirsty rabble yelled and jeered—and the two friends, Adrian and Minotti, sick at heart, pushed their way out of the ferocious crowd, and bent their steps rapidly toward the Faubourg St. Germaine.

They were too pre-occupied with sad thoughts for much conversation, and soon they arrived at the chateau, noticing again the miniature pyramid over the gateway. It was made of copper, and appeared to be a sort of receptacle, for they saw a letter lying within the entrance. Reaching up, Adrian grasped it, and was surprised to find it addressed to himself. He quickly tore it open and read the following :

“The King is dead—hail to the Dauphin. The Count and the Abbé have perished—the son still lives. The Amenophis Circle of the Order of the Chateau, Pyramid 4, bids adieu to a city that is plunging into a bloody vortex which threatens to overwhelm all wealth and learning within its radius. Already our wonderful leader and several of the

most learned members have fallen. The clouds are hovering darkly over this doomed city, and while there is yet time we leave it for a brighter land.

"All our efforts to save King Louis and our own brave Jaroslav have failed. We thought our leader absent, but last evening he reappeared and was arrested. You saw his end as we did.

"Disguised as Grey Friars we leave for Italy to-day. Beneath the chateau you will find our meeting place, in the old cavern of Charlemagne, used by him as a secret refuge for women and children in time of war, but for centuries forgotten. Care for Druná, whom you will find there, as we leave her in your charge. We will meet again under brighter skies.

"Adieu! till then.

"THE CIRCLE OF AMENOPHIS."

Adrian showed it to Minotti, and then said:

"They have left the chateau, having witnessed this morning's tragedy. Do you think they really expected to see this strange man die, or did they suppose something would occur to save him, even at the guillotine?"

"It is beyond me," was the answer. "But his glances toward the clouds would indicate that he expected something to appear which did not. His spirit evidently deserted the body ere the axe reached him."

"Who can tell what he may have seen in those dun clouds," said Adrian, as they entered the chateau. "Perhaps he may have found the sign he looked for, when he smiled so defiantly."

They entered the chamber where the bodies lay. There they were, guarded by Karnac, just as they had been left, but standing at the door which led into the catacombs, was a terror-stricken figure,

which seemed made of stone, so silent it was, and so rigid with fear. His eyes were fixed in terror upon the great python, who at the slightest indication of life would have sprung upon him.

It was the Gendarme, as he was called, and as Adrian sent Karnac into another room, the man fell forward on his face as if dead, but he soon revived, and seeing that the serpent had disappeared, recovered his courage to some extent and told his story.

It appeared that one of his companions had seen Adrian and Minotti in the catacombs while they were at work removing the bodies that morning, and recognizing the priest as the one they had seen so strangely revived in the secret vault, he had told the Gendarme, who forthwith set out after them, to claim his reward. He arrived in the chamber but a short time after they had left it, and was set upon by Karnac, who would have killed him, had not his terror kept him paralyzed with fear until their arrival.

"Holy Jesus! Save me!" he yelled, as Adrian willed the python to appear, which it did. The man made a spring for the door. But Adrian stopped him, and explained that the serpent obeyed his will, as he wished to impress the thieves through the man, that it would be dangerous to visit this spot.

So he gave commands to Karnac, who glided about as he was ordered, and struck at the furniture or coiled around it, as Adrian desired. The thief was amazed, and it was easy to be seen, would not again visit the chateau. Then Minotti and Adrian both gave him a reward, as promised, and let him

depart as he had come, through the secret entrance, satisfied that he would never trouble them again.

"Now for the packet," said Adrian, and Minotti produced it and it was opened. It contained first, two keys, one evidently for a desk or receptacle, the other for a door. Next they found a note, as follows:

"The chateau in the Faubourg St. Germaine, marked with a pyramid at the gate, as the residence of both the Abbé Renaud and the Count Jaroslav, is the meeting place of the leaders of that order to which they both belong.

"At this time, the Abbé having perished by confinement in the Conciergerie to-day, and the writer, being incarcerated in another cell of the same prison, and much doubting his ability to escape the call of death which has this night descended to him, he now directs that any one into whose hands this note may fall shall take it to the chateau mentioned and inquire for Minotti, once of the church of St. Etienne du Mont, and formerly of the Parish of St. Medard.

"If he cannot readily be found. If no one there knows of him, then use the proceeds of the ring enclosed to advertise for his address. Give this packet to him, as you would escape the dying curse of one who knows how to put a threat into execution, be he living or dead. Any man receiving and failing to deliver this packet, will be pursued by the secret order of the chateau in this life and the next.

"JAROSLAV."

This note was wrapped about a ring, the solitaire jewel of which flashed bright and clear as they looked at it. It was a ruby, of wondrous color, large and full of fire. More precious than a diamond, rare and beautiful, and as Adrian closely examined it, the stone seemed to emit sparks of in-

telligence and fire his brain. He quickly threw it from him, and they opened the next paper.

This proved to be an appeal to Minotti to accept the keys, and unlock, first, the receptacle which would be found behind a picture of Jaroslav in the main hall of the chateau; to take from it the papers, and destroy all save the will and a confession.

Next, to open the door of a secret cavern that he would find below the chateau, in the catacombs, and here a diagram was given showing its exact location and how to reach it.

Then followed an appeal to the priest to find Adrian, and deliver to him all that would be his under the will, and, as a secret brother, to secure and properly inter the remains of the Abbé Renaud and of Jaroslav, unless the guillotine should disfigure the latter body, in which case nothing need be done with it. He wrote:

“At this hour I am oppressed with a feeling of coming disaster more so than at any time in my troubled, strange career.

“I see before me as I write, sitting silent and grim in the depths of darkness, a figure new and unfamiliar. Among the shadows that have at all times surrounded me, this one alone refuses to be banished by the spells I utter, or the efficacy of the charmed ring. But one shadow thus has power to stay, and that is—Death! Not Death alone of the body, for that is Earthly, and can be held at bay by the strong spirit which knows its power; but Death of the living spirit, which I at last believe in.

There is no God. No redemption for such as I have been. Read my confession, and you will then fully understand me.

“As I speak to the unfamiliar shadow it approaches, and within its fiery eyes I see no mercy. No hereafter that can promise aught of hope to me.

"I tell it to begone!

"It lingers still before me.

"I defy it in my waning power, and it sits and grins at me with an ever deadly smile.

"I call upon his name, the Great Hierophant, and passing before me in the misty candlelight I see the grand Cave Temple of Elephanta. Within it, surrounded by his satellites, reclines a pale and ghostly figure. Upon his brow the Sacred Uraeus burns like a living flame. The thin, parched lips open, but emit no sound.

"The wavering shadows flit about him like evil omens, and now, at his side, sits the unfamiliar figure—Death!

"He sees it, and his wan face darkens as he bids it depart!

"It stays! And he frowns heavily.

"Hark! I hear the summons wafted to me from the brink of eternity!

"Meet me in Chaos to-morrow! True ministers of mine!"

"And the strange, persistent figure, calmly looks at me with its fiery eyes.

"The vision fades! No longer it defies me! It has gone! There is still hope! There is yet one chance!

"I pray to Her in my extremity! To Her, whom I drew from the starry realms with my pure adeptship in days of old.

* * * * *

"My prayer is answered, and she sits beside me. She is pleading, pleading, pleading, for that something which I cannot give. She is with me now, and as she pleads the grim figure again appears.

"'Back!' she commands, and it falls away from her, but with sinister mien beckon to me, and whispers grimly:

"'At twelve to-morrow I return!'

"It has gone, and she has promised to meet me at that hour, or before, if there is hope.

"The first grey streaks of dawn appear, and now I rest. If I can but get the Cabalistic Lemurian prayer which I have lost, I may yet cheat Death.

"It is the only hope, and she tells me you will bring it.

"Farewell! Minotti! Farewell! Adrian! Farewell! Earth! Adieu to all!

"JAROSLAV."

This was written in a bold hand, and dated that morning.

Adrian and Minotti pondered over this strange letter, but it threw no light upon his final end. The Lemurian prayer he had received. What had it availed him? Who could tell? Not those who saw it given.

They now examined the large, life-like portrait of Jaroslav in the hallway, and swinging it back, looked for some little time, and finally found a small opening. In a moment they had unlocked the receptacle, and in it they saw a number of papers, some musty and old, others of later date. In a little drawer they came across a will, and by its side lay a voluminous confession, marked in plain writing: "To be opened only when Count Jaroslav has disappeared from the face of Earth."

They destroyed the other papers as requested, and opening the will, found that it left everything to Adrian, Count Balzac, with the exception of the Jaroslav estates, which he was to hold in trust for Vera, should she return. The will was duly attested and signed.

"He evidently knew there was no danger from the real Count Jaroslav. There was no habitation for him to return to that would place him in position to claim his own," said Minotti.

By this time they thought best to bring the veiled figure of Isis here to the chateau, before it grew dark, as the shadows were already lengthening outside. So Minotti went after the image promising to likewise make an application at the Conciergerie for the Abbé Renaud's remains before returning.

Adrian sat alone beside the bodies of Vera and Philip. He had a dim and shadowy remembrance of seeing the beautiful face of Vera, and of its impressing him vividly, but he could not grasp fully the details of their meeting in space, although he had carefully thought it over in his writing the previous night. Philip's objections to her had evidently fled, for his dictation betrayed no sign of ill-will, though mentioning her frequently.

As he looked upon Vera's pure, lovely face, his heart awoke within him, and he felt that should she return, he would willingly make amends for his father's actions toward her by a lifetime of devotion. But his awakening love for Vera did not lift the gloom from his heart when he thought of Eve, and he silently hoped that both could quickly return, and then he felt that his life would be content.

This day and night would decide it, and his search would end. But how? Would his presentiment regarding Eve be fulfilled, or would she return?

He pondered deeply over this momentous question until Minotti entered with the wonderful image, placing it carefully upon an ebony table in the apartment.

The authorities had refused to, or were unable to state what had become of the Abbé Renaud's body, but Minotti intended making a thorough search for it the next day. Minotti silently stood by Adrian's

side, and together they gazed upon the sleepers before them.

Philip, by his own confession, did not intend returning. Vera, by the prophecy of the veiled image, would probably awaken some time during the coming night. But of her—Eve—the long lost one—what of Eve? And in deep dejection Adrian sat in the fast approaching twilight, and endeavored to solve the question, Minotti sadly watching him.

At last Adrian arose, and Minotti suggested that they should visit the secret cave of Charlemagne, below the chateau. So taking the key and the diagram they started, and lighting the lamps of the apartment, took one, and were soon descending the rocky stairway. In a few moments they reached the gallery indicated by the diagram, and soon they stood at the door of the cavern, which, like that of the vault, was made of a single stone, and appeared to be a part of the rocky wall. They soon opened it, and entering were surprised to find themselves in a vast cavern, extending far beyond the rays of their feeble lamp, while before them yawned a black and seemingly deep chasm, with steps cut from the solid rock, leading down—to where?

“What is this?” said Adrian, looking about him in wondering curiosity.

As he spoke a silent, queer figure joined them, and pointing to the steps below, beckoned for both to follow. It was a peculiar figure. A woman, evidently, old and wan, seemingly dumb, probably deaf, bent with age, and with the Hindoo cast of features plainly stamped upon her wrinkled face. She was dressed in faded yellow, and was evidently in a state of somnambula, for she bore no light in

this dark cavern, and her eyes indicated that condition.

Without a word they followed her, and down they went, down, it seemed to the two friends, a never ending stairway, and finally arriving at the bottom, they cast their eyes around, and looming before them, built from blocks of solid stone, there plainly rose the slanting side of an Egyptian pyramid, far larger than the one beneath the Chateau Balzac. They sought the entrance, and above it, carved in the stone tablet, they read :

“Pyramid 4. Amenophis.”

They entered, and passing through the narrow, inclined stone passage, they were soon in the main chamber. Before them lay a picture strange and weird. This peculiar apartment was fitted throughout magnificently in the ancient style of fittings, regardless of expense. Heavy curtains hung in profusion about the walls, embroidered in gold work of rich design. Turkish divans were scattered here and there in restful attitudes and inviting silence. Rugs culled from the richest patterns and most expensive hues of Persia and of Turkey lay upon the polished marble floor.

Here gleamed a golden figure of Serapis, and there the four-faced features of Brahma, while everywhere in rest and peace together, as though the Earth had not been deluged in blood to convert the unbeliever to their different faiths, were scattered the images of the various gods of the world, ancient and modern.

The Turkish Koran lay beside the Indian Vedas. The hieroglyphics of the Egyptian Book of the Dead touched corners with the ancient Hebrew Scrip-

tures, and everywhere there appeared that cosmopolitanism which was expressed by the words upon the beautiful banner hanging overhead :

“ ALL NATIONS HERE ARE WELCOME.”

“ WE LIVE TO LEARN.”

A curtain at one end evidently shielded an alcove, and there the quiet guide led them, when they had gazed about the larger apartment. Not another person had they seen. Not the slightest indication that anyone had lately been in this elegant chamber, and as they lifted the curtain, both started back in astonishment.

Before them, sitting calmly upon a beautiful throne, was—Eve !

The color of life illumined her complexion—the golden hair crowned her lovely face with lifelike coils of shining beauty. Her dress was of pure white silk, falling about her in folds of grace and modesty. One rounded arm was thrown carelessly behind her head, which leaned upon it, and partly against the support for the satin canopy above. The other hand fell listlessly into her lap, and held a letter.

It was a picture of sleeping beauty, pure, modest, lovely, untainted, and as the two gazed upon it Adrian suddenly knelt at her feet, and clasped the hand containing the letter, pressed it to his lips, and slowly said from the depths of his truest nature :

“ Oh, my beautiful, charming Mother, awake, awake, and return to me.”

But no answering movement broke the stillness, and the sleeper slept on as before.

Adrian bowed his head with anguish, and Minotti

silently placed a hand upon his grief-stricken figure. For a few moments neither spoke, and then Adrian sorrowfully said :

“Tuaa was in error, for the figure stated that both were animated.”

“That was last night,” returned Minotti, sadly.

“True,” said Adrian, “and if she was here then her spirit may yet return,” and he unfolded the letter he had taken from her hand with trembling fingers.

Quickly he read the delicate tracery :

“For one short day I have been permitted to return, that at the last hours of his doomed life, I might plead with an utterly lost son of Earth. It has been useless, as those who permitted the supplication knew it would be.

“All the dismal night I plead with him, entreating a repentance that he could not feel. Asking a recognition he would not admit of One whom he has wronged the most.

“I failed. 'Tis over, and his wretched, outcast spirit soon will pass from this sheath of clay forever. Not till ages hence can he gain pardon. Never again will his restless spirit wander o'er this Earth in human form.

“His lives are past ! His future lost !

“O ! Adami !—Red Earth, grand and glorious ! How have your children fallen. The tree of knowledge leads them oft astray, and warring minds would each command the way to Him, who rules in charity.

“Farewell ! Adrian, my beloved son of an Earthly life. To-night I will send one to cheer you in your loneliness. I must meet his fallen spirit as it passes, and then forever we are parted.

“Adieu to Earth—to you, my Adrian—to this frail shell forever. The hour is at hand. I go to him. Farewell !”

* * * * *

Again Adrian and Minotti stood before the veiled image of Isis. Again they looked with sad eyes upon the reclining figures of the dreamless ones.

The lamplight cast its shadows over the rich apartment, and touched the faces of the sleepers with its silent caress, bringing out in strong relief the fine, *spirituelle* features of Vera, in beautiful contrast to the intellectual, melancholy ones of Philip.

Night had fallen again over the city, and was far advanced. Outside the wintry snow was falling. Falling like a baptism of purity—over the wrathful passions of men—over the sorrowing hearts of mankind—over the storm-tossed city.

As it fell, Adrian stood with bowed head beside the veiled figure, and felt that each flake dropped upon the grave of his lost aspirations for his lovely Mother—Eve—and buried them under a covering of purer, truer motive, white as the driven snow.

"Courage, Adrian, courage," whispered Minotti, placing his arms about the silent figure. "Cast from thy heart all thoughts of self, and a purer, truer adeptship will draw you closer to the throbbing heart of nature and the highest power. For years I studied and I failed. It has passed. The Earth-Born shadows ne'er shall encompass me again. Cast the wish from you that still holds thy heart."

"Cast it from you, Child of Earth," said the veiled figure. "Send it forth, and the night and the shadows will reply."

As the veiled image slowly spoke, Adrian lifted his bowed figure, and without a tremor said :

"I would not that she should return to Earth, if through His will her life here has been ended."

The words ceased, the room faded away and melted

into nothingness, and through the snowy clouds of Earth around them and above them shone the beautiful, clear starlight.

Far, far away in the blue ether, travelling toward them like a wonderful line of stellar fire, shot from the furnace of creation, fell a nebulous, glorious path of light. Soon it encircled them, lighting their features with its brilliant purity, and as they looked through its long stretch of illumination, they saw at the end the wonderful ice-bound cavern of Neptune.

Majestic and grand the cold, clear glaciers shone in the astral light. Deep and fathomless the abyss of the crater stretched before them, while the shifting snow flakes drifted here and there, eddying down, down the sides of the frozen glaciers, into the vast depths below.

Standing within the ice-bound cavern, fantastically dressed in its weird costume of crystal icicles, while about them fell the drifting snow flakes, were the three figures—haughty, powerful, commanding Lilith, wearing her crown of the blazing sun. Beautiful, *spirituelle*, star-eyed Eve, pure and tender as a dream of innocence. And beside them Vera—radiant, lovely, fair and fresh as the morning. Down the long and misty vistas of space came the beautiful Vera, and as she sped toward them, these words fell echoing faintly before her, like the last sad notes of a mournful requiem :

“Adrian, my cherished Child of Earth, mourn not for Eve. In coming centuries we may meet again. From the starry realm I send you one with my farewells and benediction. Adieu !”

Down, down through the glorious, white astral light, drawn by the adeptship of purity, sped the

radiant vision of beauty. Like sweetest melody from the stars floated her tender greeting :

“Adrian, my king, I come to you.”

Far, far away to the North, looming above the horizon like an impenetrable figure of fate, stood the grand and awful shape of Terrasal, his stony eyes looking over the world in an unfathomable glance, and his waiting attitude one of sure power and final possession.

As they silently gazed upon this luminous, wonderful figure, casting its grand reflections over the steely, cold, blue icebergs—over the great, wide oceans—over the land and sky—this warning rolled solemnly around the world, echoing in its mountains and its valleys :

“The Earth is mine, and mine alone. Like atoms its peoples exist and return to my bosom. They are finite. All—all—Earth-Born.”

* * * * *

The vision faded away, Adrian turned his head, and there, standing beside him in the lamplight, Vera, pure and lovely, held out her arms to him with the glad cry :

“At last !”

* * * * *

The long, strange search was ended, and outside the winter's snow still silently fell. Fell like a mantle of charity. Fell like a cloud-born benediction.

THE END

